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# LUKE'S CIRCUS



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RUTH MANNING-SANDERS



COLLINS

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TO ALL MEMBERS OF  
A BRAVE AND GENEROUS PROFESSION.  
AND ESPECIALLY TO FLO AND FRED ROSAIRE,  
IN GRATITUDE FOR THEIR FRIENDSHIP,  
AND FOR THEIR HELP IN THE  
MAKING OF THIS BOOK.



## BOOK ONE





## I

THE year 1898, the time five o'clock on a hot afternoon in May, the place a level field in the suburbs of the little town of Whitfield, in Yorkshire, where the matinée performance of Sam Beckett's circus was in full swing. The field lay in a narrow valley (Whitfield, like Rome, was built on seven hills); on one side of it rose a distressingly ugly confusion of red brick dwellings and allotment gardens, on the other side wooded slopes cut the sky-line, with the detached villas of well-to-do factory owners showing among the trees. The smokiest, dirtiest little town in England, some people called Whitfield, and, perhaps, for six months out of the twelve it well deserved that appellation. But to-day, in the suburbs, the sun shone merrily and the sky was blue; birds sang among the fresh green leaves, and the circus field was gay with colour and movement.

Sam Beckett's Famous British and All World Circus, The Greatest Show on Earth, had arrived in town that morning. It was not in reality very great, or very famous, and as to being 'all world,' that was mere bunk, for, apart from the three elephants, not one of its performers had ever crossed the channel. It was just a snug little family concern, well managed and orderly, assured of a welcome in all the small towns it visited, and prospering in its modest way because, as old Sam Beckett was often heard to declare, he took no risks, he wasn't a man to get swelled head, to go beyond himself and go bust. No, *sir*, he knew where to stop, did this Rum-Cul. Though not very adventurous or very startling in his programme, Sam Beckett put up a good show, and expected and received an adequate remuneration; his beasts were well cared for, his artistes, though by no means stars of the first magnitude, were competent and worked for him cheerfully, and the big-top, though patched here and there and considerably faded by the sun, reared up bravely under the blue sky, and was guaranteed not to leak, even in a thunder shower.

Yes, a sound little concern was Beckett's, and now, still

fresh from its winter overhauling, with its highly coloured and boldly decorated façade, with the new paint and gilt scrolling on its grouped wagons glittering in the afternoon sunlight, and the new Union Jacks fluttering lazily from the tops of the two king poles, with its purple and yellow striped horse tent, its green elephant tent, its red, white and blue novelty tent, its bell tents, and green and yellow lorries, its ornate stage coach and scarlet-lettered monkey carriage, with its general air of fantastic activities and unfamiliar bustle, it presented a stirring enough spectacle to such of the townsfolk as had elected not to attend the matinée but to wander loitering about the field.

On the shadow side of tents and wagons, heavy piebald draught horses dozed in the shade; from behind the big-top a group of jet black ponies, whose act was just over, came prancing out into the sunlight, then stood with tossing heads and switching tails to have the blue and silver trappings lifted from their glossy bodies; among the living wagons and tents there was a constant coming and going of clowns, scantily dressed equestriennes and acrobats, green or red-plumed horses, excited dogs in paper collars and ponderously moving elephants with gold head-dresses and polished toenails, while from within the big-top, whose stretched canvas sides were vaguely patterned by the silhouettes of the spectators, a six-man band, with brassy, energetic din, blared forth its insistent music.

Now the band was silent and you heard the yelling voices of the clowns; gusts of laughter rattled round the wallings, bursts of clapping and stamping of feet. The loiterers outside listened, smiled and meandered over to the pay-box to book tickets for the evening performance. A good rousing show, undoubtedly, they thought, and a popular one. Nothing like a circus for making you laugh and forget your troubles; it's fine to be a kid again, and we're all of us kids when we get inside a circus tent. There's a lot to be said for a circus—it's honest. It sets out to amuse you, and it does amuse you. It doesn't try to instruct you, to improve your mind, to fub you off with a gilded pill, like some forms of entertainment one could name. Instruction is all very well in its place, but one isn't always thirsting for it, even in these enlightened days of the nineteenth century, especially not on a shining May day, when

the earth is stirred and thrilling with the thought of summer, and all nature is joyous as the song of a lark. No, this is no time for improving the mind; give us amusement, give us laughter, give us the glorious, inconsequent feeling of everlasting youth—give us the Circus.

'Six at two bob for to-night, please, missus.' 'Two at a shilling and four halves.' 'Five at ninepence'—the box office was doing a brisk trade.

On the side of the big-top farthest from the living wagons, mid-way between the box office and the ring entrance, where he was more or less hidden by the spread of the horse tent, a small boy lay on his stomach and pushed his rumpled, tow-coloured head under the walling of the big-top. Then he drew out his head again and peered cautiously round him. His rather comical little face, with its knobby nose, full sensitive mouth and bright blue eyes, was rigid with purpose, there was a frown of concentration on his forehead, and his lips were drawn up and pouting as if he were holding his breath. He had indeed but one purpose in life at that moment, to get in under the canvas and take his seat among the audience without being discovered. His heart was thumping painfully against his chest, there was a faint mist before his eyes, a faint roaring in his ears; he hadn't a penny to bless himself with, he never had, his mam was stingy and she called him a bad boy—bad boys weren't rewarded with her hard-won pennies. But he'd get in, pennies or no pennies, 's'welp him, Bob.' He *would*, he belonged to the circus world, however much his mam might disapprove, his grandad had owned the biggest circus that ever was, but he, the grandson, had never till this day set eyes on a circus.

'Oh Lord—oh God—oh Jesus Christ help me!' The small boy prayed, cast one more anguished glance behind him, wriggled under the canvas walling and lay for an instant, panting and blinking, in a limp heap within.

A smell of sawdust, a smell of crowded human bodies, a smell of hot grass, a smell of horses, a smell of naphtha gas, orange peel, peppermints, chocolate creams; trumpets and drums rattling out a waltz tune, the soft thud of hoofs in time to the music, a volley of clapping hands . . . The small boy stood up and drew a long, quavering breath, and from under the

canvas walling, still gently moving where he had disturbed it, a runnel of sunlight followed him in and washed timidly about his feet. In front of him, on narrow planks, the backs of people rose tier above tier, some with legs dangling, some with feet thrust awkwardly against the seats of the folk on the plank below them. Behind him the canvas now hung motionless; the runnel of sunlight had crept back outside, as if afraid to venture any farther. To the left and right of him ran a narrow circular lane of green turf, on which he stood, guilty and alone. The small boy plunged forward among the dangling legs of the spectators. Somebody's restlessly swinging heel caught him on the side of the head. For a moment he saw stars and whimpered under his breath, then, with urgent hands pushing aside boots, shoes and skirted and trousered legs, he wormed his way forward, ever forward, until he sat triumphant in an empty space on the very front plank.

He was here, at last, where he had always longed to be, where he had pictured himself so often, inside a circus, the mellow rays of combined gaslight and filtered sunlight falling like a benediction over his head, the ring with its golden scatter of sawdust lying immediately in front of him! "Oh Lord—oh God—oh Jesus Christ, thank you and make me deserve it!"

Into the ring, like a being straight leaping from the glorious world of dreams, a dark, curly-headed man in red boots, white silk shirt and wide black velvet trousers, shot on a piebald horse. "Hi! Hi! Hi!" the young man shouted, his mouth was wide open, grinning, his brown eyes lit with the wildest excitement. "Hi! Hi!" he was riding standing up now, his red-booted feet set lightly, but how surely, on that plunging back, his knees just bent in loveliest balance, his head and body rising and falling with the movements of the horse, his dark, luxurious hair flying up from his forehead as if it possessed a life of its own. "Hi!" he somersaulted forward off the back of the galloping piebald. "Hi!" he took a running leap and was standing on it again. "Hi! Hi! Hi!" he was dancing on its back now, the horse had a collar of bells round its neck, its head was stretched out, its nostrils dilated. "Hi! hi! hi!" the young man leaped and yelled, the bells shook and jangled, trumpet and drum blared out a loud, blood-maddening tune. This was

the Cossack Act, the pride of Beckett's Circus, performed by Tommy, Sam Beckett's madcap eldest son. The small watching boy sat gazing, unconscious now of all things but the scene before him, forgetful of the world outside, forgetful of his escapade, forgetful that he had crept like a thief into a forbidden paradise, forgetful even of his own identity. Tears stood in his eyes, a laughing sob caught at his throat. "Hi! Hi! Hi!" he was himself the man on the horse, it was he who careered somersaulting and wildly dancing round the ring. But he was more than that, oh, more than that, he was also the horse, the ring, the band, the crowd of applauding people, the gaslight and the filtered sunlight, the medley of hot smells, the over-arching tent, he was all these things, and all these things were himself—he was God, and this was his circus.

"You there! I saw you sneaking in. You ain't paid, my lad."

Someone took hold of his arm, but the small boy did not look up, he was still absorbed in his vision. His elbow, mechanically jerking away the intrusion, bumped against the soft fatness of a woman's thigh. Then the woman's bulk loomed big between him and the glories of the ring.

"You cheeky little devil—what's yer name?"

"Luke—Luke Castle."

"My God! I'll give you Luke Castle. Where's your money?"

"I ain't got no money." Luke began to tremble. His heart throbbed with an emotion that was not fright but rage and despair. It was coming now, he was going to be turned out of his world, his world that he had only just entered. He stood up, not to escape from the woman but to see round her, to look whilst there was yet time at the vision that was to be snatched from him. As a man condemned to death might gaze at the last glories of the sun, so Luke turned his eyes toward the circus ring. The man with the red boots had gone; now, demure and silent-stepping, the three elephants with the gold head-dresses and the polished toenails were moving into the ring. Dark grey on the shadowed side, pale grey where the lights fell on them, how beautiful they were!—

"Just-you hark at this!" exclaimed the stout woman, addressing herself to the row of faces immediately above Luke. "He ain't got no money! He thinks we're a bloomin' charity!"

The faces grinned half-heartedly, the big woman was distracting their attention from the elephants, they looked past her, just as Luke did. The woman pounced again on Luke and gripped his shoulder with a plump, but remarkably strong, many-ringed hand.

"How do you think the likes of us live? Answer me that!"

Luke scarcely heard what she said, he was in a dream, clinging desperately to his vision.

"Come on out of it. Come on out of it, you saucy little black-guard."

He was being hustled along in front of the seats now, but he still turned his eyes toward the ring. Over his head the woman's voice exclaimed and scolded. "Never see such a kid in my life! You ought to be ashamed—how old are you?"

"Nine."

"My God, only nine, eh? And the sauce of Satan already! You'll be in prison, my lad, that's where you'll be, afore you're many years older." The woman's dark, energetic face was scowling ferociously, but she was not really angry. Had Luke been more alert to the intricacies of the situation he might have noticed that she winked several times, and jerked her head in a confidential, would-you-believe-it manner to the spectators as they moved their knees automatically and shifted their feet to let Luke and his captor go by. Had he not been so desperately absorbed in looking his last on glory, he might have heard her say, "'Tisn't as if he'd asked, if we let one rogue in free, we've as good as let the whole bloomin' town in"; he might have become aware of the general atmosphere of good-humoured amusement above him and, emboldened by it, have flung himself on stout Mrs. Beckett's mercy and implored her to let him stay, babbling out his circus ancestry and whose proud blood ran in his veins. But he was aware of nothing but the central fact, he saw nothing but his vanishing vision, he heard nothing but receding music, until the last loudly shouted words that spoke the death warrant of his short-lived ecstasy: "Out you go!" Then

he was standing in the sunlight with the entrance flap dropped behind him. And he was surely the most unhappy child that ever the sun shone on——

He felt he couldn't go home. He had miched from school that morning to watch the circus parade, a fact that would need explaining to his harassed, anxious-eyed mother. But that wasn't the reason he couldn't go home. He couldn't go home because every drop of his blood cried out that his natural home was here, in the circus field among the piebald horses and the chattering monkeys, with the smell of the sun-dried canvas in his nostrils, and the crack of the whip and the sharp orders of the ring-master sounding from inside the big-top. In some way that he couldn't explain he identified himself with these sights and sounds and smells; he had never set eyes on an elephant before this day, but when the great beasts moved softly past him, crossing from the big-top back to their own quarters, holding on to each others' tails and glancing down at him sideways out of their little twinkling eyes, it seemed as if he had always known that elephants moved like that. The leading elephant had brushed his hand with her searching trunk, and her hot damp breath had moistened his palm. That, too, was a familiar sensation—elephant breath. Surely he had once had a dream about that? He trailed in the wake of the three huge beasts and, peeping into their tent somewhat timidly (for little boys who had no pennies were hustled out of circuses) watched how they sedately backed themselves on to their straw-covered wooden platforms, suffered themselves to be chained, each by a hind leg, to an iron picket, and stood swaying their trunks and meditating in the green gloaming that smelt of hay and the warmth of their great bodies.

But when their keeper, a tall man with one arm and long greasy-looking hair, got up from his camp-bed in a corner of the tent and strolled toward Luke, Luke ran away, because he had a fear that the man might order him off the field, as a bad boy who had been turned out of the circus.

So round to the back of the elephant tent Luke scuttled, and there he saw a little girl leading a mongrel dog on a string. She was perhaps five years old, she had dark curly hair with tawny lights in it, black eyes and a sharp little sunburned face.



She was talking energetically to the dog, stooping over it and slapping it with a drooping stalk of sorrel. "Peter," she said, stamping her foot at the dog, "ain't I working yer to-day? You got to do as I say."

Peter wagged his tail; he curled his head round and snuffled the sorrel stalk.

"That your dog?" asked Luke, with assumed nonchalance.

The little girl straightened her slender body and stared at Luke. His ears were red and his face rather pale and desperate-looking, with the self-consciousness of an interloper who is determined to stand his ground. The little girl had a self-consciousness of another kind, that of a being already aware of herself as belonging to a superior race of mortals, utterly fearless, supremely confident. Without deigning to answer Luke, she let go the dog and carefully put her feet together. Then she began to move them apart, toes, heels, toes, heels, wider and wider. Staring at Luke all the time she solemnly did the splits.

Luke's heart burned with envy; but he could do something too, he was a nob at gym., even his elder brother, John, admitted that, but no one had ever "learned" him to do the splits. He flung his heels into the air and stood on his head.

The little girl watched him gravely. Luke stood on his head till he thought his brain would burst, then he came right side up again with a face the colour of raw beef.

The little girl turned a cartwheel.

Ho! but Luke could do that too! he also turned a cartwheel, a grand straight one, hand over head and heel over hand, all in one line, better than the girl's. Hers had been a limp, one-sided affair compared to his.

He looked at her triumphantly. "How's that?" he asked.

The little girl didn't answer. She just eyed him, taking him in, as it were, weighing up his appearance and his accomplishments. Apparently they didn't amount to much in her estimation. Her face was primmed up into an impudent expression of disdain. Then her eyes sparkled as if with some secret amusement. She stiffened her thin little body, put her arms straight down to her sides, bent her knees slightly, and, suddenly and surprisingly, turned a back somersault. One moment she was standing in front of Luke, the next moment her heels were over

her head, and the next moment she was standing in front of Luke on the same spot.

"How's that, Flatty?" she shrilled.

Utterly chagrined, Luke shrugged his shoulders.

"Anna, Anna, Anna! Darnation take the kid! Here, what you at? Me looking everywhere and you not dressed, you bad girl, and Precious waiting, and your act in a few minutes. Didn't you listen what the band's been playing? How many more times must I tell you that you did ought to come to the wagon when they start up Ta-ra-ra?" In red tights and spangled tunic a slim woman with hair like the child's and the same wide, dark eyes, swirled down upon them, lifted Anna in her naked brown arms and hurried off with her towards one of the living wagons.

Luke looked after them. Anna's head went bob, bob, bob, above her mother's shoulder. She turned her face to stare back at Luke. Then her red lips parted and her tongue shot out; in and out, in and out it went, flickering her derision of little boys who lived in brick houses and couldn't do the splits.

Slowly, with hands in pockets and dragging feet, Luke trailed away to the gate of the field. The wings of his so recently exalted spirit drooped heavily. *His* circus indeed! He had nothing to do with it. He was cast out and rejected, first by the fat woman with the loud voice (who must, Luke felt certain, own the whole show, to judge by her bossy behaviour), and next by a mere bit of a girl, who didn't stand as high as his shoulder, and whom he could easily knock flat with his right hand tied behind his back, if boys were ever allowed to flatten out girls, which they weren't. Bitterly, if vaguely, Luke felt that it was not only these two people, but the circus itself that had cast him out. The circus said, in effect, "You don't belong to my world, nor I to yours." Through the mouth of its youngest member it had hurled its reproach after him, summing up its appraisal of him in the one word "Flatty," a word which Luke was uneasily conscious of having heard before—and used in no complimentary sense. But he *did* belong to the circus, in his blood and his bones he knew it, and he was not a flatty, whatever that nasty word meant.

What did it mean exactly? He knew what he'd do, he'd go and see if his Great-aunt Marta had come home. She under-

stood all about circuses, she had been born in one, she'd tell him what flatty meant. His mam would be expecting him back to tea, but that couldn't be helped, he must go round to the yard where Marta lived and see if she had returned. He could talk circus to Marta, and he must talk circus. In the anticipation of perhaps seeing his great-aunt, whom he loved passionately—more, far more than he loved any one else in the world—Luke's spirit recovered buoyancy, even defiance.

From the gate of the field he glanced back at the gay conglomeration of sunlit canvas, painted wood and piebald horses that was Beckett's Circus. He began to talk under his breath. "One fine day," he said, "*I'll* have a circus. S'welp me, Bob, I will."

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## I I

“ My grandad, Lucio Castelli, owned the biggest circus in the world. My granma, Erzebet Castelli, used to be shot out of a golden cannon into the circus ring. My dad, Ambrus Castelli, was the Morning Star in circus when he was two years old. And *my real name is not Luke Castle at all*, but Lucio Castelli like my grandad. How’s that, how’s that you cheeky circus girl what put out your tongue at me?”

Luke was still talking under his breath as he hurried away from the circus field; he was saying over to himself all the bold and splendid words that should have been said to the circus girl. They were true words. Then why had he not been able to say them? Why did the mere muttering of them now, when there was no one to overhear, give him a pain in his chest and fill him with such a high despairing pride as made him want to sob? Because granma Erzebet had been killed one day shooting out of her cannon; because grandad Lucio had gone ‘ crackers ’ with grief, and chucked up his circus and his wealth and his glory, and hidden himself away on a moorland farm near Whitfield; because Luke’s dad, Ambrus, had got typhoid and died on that farm before Luke was old enough to remember him; because, after that, grandad Lucio had hated Luke’s mam and turned her to doors; because Luke’s mam was now ashamed that she had married ‘ circus,’ and had changed her name from Castelli to Castle, and his name from Lucio to Luke; because Luke’s mam forbade him to mention that he was circus, she said it was bad for her dressmaking business, she said circus wasn’t respectable, she said Luke’s great-aunt, Marta Castelli, who, on her piebald steed, Marcellin, Beauty-of-the-Ring, had ridden bareback before all the crowned heads of Europe, was no better than a dirty old gipsy woman. But she wasn’t, she wasn’t, she was the most wonderful person in all the world. . . .

This ‘ most wonderful person in all the world ’ lived in a yellow wagon in the Old Bell Yard, behind Mr. Whale’s livery stables. She didn’t any more ride bareback before the crowned

heads of Europe because she was getting on for sixty. She lived on an annuity which she had bought with the small amount of property her poor mad brother, Lucio, had left her at his death. She wanted for nothing, she envied nobody, she was strong, vigorous, brave, possessed by an eternal spirit of youth, it seemed. This spirit informed every movement of her lean body, animated every expression of her deeply lined face. It looked at you out of her brilliantly dark and vivacious eyes, it spoke in her joyously reckless voice, it kept her mind ever alert, and bestowed upon her an unfailing zest for life. When the mood took her she would pack her chickens into a travelling coop, hire a horse from Mr. Whale and go off in her yellow wagon for a jaunt through the pleasant highways of England. She had been off on such a jaunt this week, visiting Framleydale Fair, but she had promised Luke that she would be back to-day, and—"Oh Lord—oh God *make* her be back, because if I don't tell someone about the circus quickly I'll—I'll *burst* like Judas Iscariot!"

But, despite the urgency of his spirit, Luke did not take the most direct way to Marta's yard, for that would have led him past the bottom of Camershaw Road, where he lived. He wasn't going to risk that way, lest his mam be buying her needles and cottons at the draper's on the corner, or his brother, John, be out on a like errand for her. John was a good boy, and made it his business to report Luke's badnesses to their mam.

So Luke left the highroad just outside the circus field, went up a steep, tree-bordered lane, across a hilly green where some new houses were being built, and so down hill again through fields that backed both Camershaw Road and Marta's yard.

Yes, Marta was home. From the fields Luke could see, beyond the yard wall, the top of the yellow wagon white in the sun, with a thin column of blue smoke rising from its iron chimney stack. At a run he went down the hill, round by the stables, in through the little door in the big wooden gates and, pelting across the yard, scattered the chickens that were pecking grain at the foot of the wagon, took the wagon steps two at a time, and hurled himself into Marta's arms.

She was sitting preparing potatoes for her supper; she had a bowl on her knee, a sharp little knife in one hand, and a half-peeled potato in the other. The knife was flung down, the bowl

was upset, the peelings strewn over the floor, and the half-peeled potato rolled away under the table as she jumped up to clasp Luke to her bosom.

"Gran'an! Gran'an!"

"Luke! Luke!"

Her mouth was wide open, she was laughing, he was laughing, closely embraced they rocked to and fro.

"There's a lad, there's a boy!" She detached herself to rummage on the littered bed for the presents she had brought, one parcel for Luke, and one for him to take home to John, because, though she was not interested in John, in fairness she must treat them both alike.

"Gran'an, there's a *circus* in En'cliffe Bottoms, elephants and piebalds, an' all! Oh, Gran'an, I seen it!" Announcing these almost ineffable facts, Luke's voice quavered between a laugh and a sob.

"Aye," said Marta. "Beckett's, ain't it? Caught sight o' the bills as I come through."

Luke was undoing the string round his parcel. Absently his small fingers picked at the knots. "I got inside er the big-top," he said, "only a—a woman turned me out." He looked up at Marta with troubled eyes. He had a question he must ask, and he dreaded the answer to it. "What's a flattie, Gran'an?"

"Flatties?" said Marta scornfully, as she stooped to pick up the spilt potato peelings. "The world's full of 'em."

"Yes, but what are they?"

Marta seated herself once more with the bowl between her knees and the knife in her hand. She punctuated her remarks with digs of the knife point at the potato eyes, an extra rapid twirling off of curled lengths of peel, and a tossing of each peeled potato with a sharp 'plonk' into an iron saucepan that stood on the floor.

"Flatties? Why every one knows what flatties is—folk with a narrer look in their eyeballs, and narrer thoughts in their nuts; folk what dursen't live to-day for fear of what's coming to-morrer; folk what worrit themselves sick over the things their neighbours may say of 'em; folk what would sooner have their bodies clean than use 'em; folk what would sooner be ordinary than different; folk what prefer a feather bed for their old age

above freedom for their youth; folk what walk with their pigeon toes in a rut, squinting at their troubles; folk what wish to live their lives over again and live 'em different; folk what envy those as ain't made like 'em; folk what has to be amused by circus workers such as us, because they're too darn silly to amuse themselves——"

"Gosh!" exclaimed Luke.

Marta had all her potatoes in the pan, now; vigorously and disdainfully she poured cold water over them, as if she was pouring it upon the heads of the flatties. Then she gave the saucepan a rattle and set it on the stove.

"Flatties, that's what they are," she said, "just flatties. They're all of 'em flatties if they're not yobs, and yobs and flatties is tarred with the same brush."

"Tarred?" queried Luke. "I thought you said they didn't like dirt?"

"Go on, get away do, what a lad you are! Whitewashed out of the same pail then."

Luke frowned. He had the knots of the string undone, but he hadn't yet unwrapped his present. "Someone called me a flatty to-day, Gran'an," he said slowly, "but I'm not, am I? I'm circus really, aren't I?" He reached up and shook Marta's arm, as she stood by the stove. "Say I'm circus, Gran'an. Go on! Say it! Say it!"

His face was pink, he was blushing at the remembrance of what he had been called, and because his gran'an was chuckling. "Say it!" he repeated, almost crying.

"Bless your buttons!" said Marta. "You're circus, all right. Leastways you ought to be. Ain't I told you a score of times you're yer grandma Erzebet come back to life?"

"Show me the picture of granma in her cannon dress," urged Luke.

"And what about that parcel in your hands? Am I having me presents flung back in me face?"

"Oh no, but——" Luke hastily opened the brown paper. Inside was a second-hand volume on the training of the horse, and a packet of gingerbread fairings. He flung his arms round Marta's neck to thank her, but his mind was too preoccupied with other things to pay attention to presents.

"Now show me the picture of Erzebet," he coaxed.

"It'll fall to pieces, sure and sartin it will, if I show it you any more," said Marta. "Well then—all right." She opened a locker under the bed and delved among a pile of papers, rags, head-dresses, feathers, torn silks, and brightly coloured, worn-out garments. The delving was a slow process, because Marta must often pause to admire, and have Luke admire, these relics of past greatness. "See," she said, holding up a green velvet tunic trimmed with ostrich feathers, "I wore this one in the Courier act, astride of three hosses. The great Andrew Ducrow—you've heard me tell about him—he never straddled but two, so they say, but I straddled me three, easy—And here," holding up another costume, "that was a pretty 'un, yaller always did suit me a treat—bit scrimpy though, for them days—Oh and this ballet skirt, I wore this in the Pas-de-Deux, you know, two hosses and me being tossed about like, by me partner."

Trying not to appear impatient, for he had heard all this many and many a time before, and it was not at the moment what he wanted, Luke watched and waited. By and by: "Show me Erzebet, Gran'an, *please*," he pleaded.

"Hold on, where's the hurry, ain't I getting at her?" answered Marta, as she lovingly handled the time-dimmed and threadbare fineries.

It was a faded circus bill that she, at last, brought out and carefully unfolded, laying it flat on the table. The paper was frayed to holes in the creases, and its once gay yellow and red colouring was bleached and spotted with age and mildew. The print was in a foreign language, Luke couldn't read a word of it. The date at the bottom was 1856. "Aye," said Marta, "in Bavaria, the year your dad was born. Dear Lord, I can recall it as if it was yesterday! There she flies—there's Erzebet."

Dead clowns and buried horses, forgotten rope walkers, worn out elephants, dogs that had crumbled to dust, acrobats that had vanished—who knows where? They were all there, still ghostlike, displaying themselves and their talents round the tattered margins of Lucio Castelli's All Star Circus bill. And, centre top, in the place of honour, under the draped crown slung between two rampant horses that had been the great Castelli's all con-



quering mark, a small figure of a woman in pointed bodice and short flouncing skirt, flew headlong like an arrow into space.

With his fair, ruffled head stooped over the table, Luke gazed and pondered.

"And she was just like me, Gran'an?" he said in a small voice.

"Aye, lad," answered Marta, "just like you. At least," she added after a moment's thought, "that's in a manner of speaking, you understand, she didn't have your nose. Not but what your nose is a grand expressionful one, but hers was small and straight, more classy, if you get me. But you've got the same little ways and tricks of looking, you hold your head like what she did, and——" Marta, after struggling to find words that would express a resemblance which was more of the spirit than the flesh, gave up the attempt and sniffed impatiently. "That's enough of that," she said; "Best I put that there paper safe away afore it's tore to bits."

Luke, with a burst of eager volubility, began to tell about Beckett's Circus, describing it all minutely, even to the smell of the gaslight and sawdust, and the sound the horses' hoofs made in the ring between one note of music and the next, describing it as if it were a new miracle, as if it were the first time a circus had appeared in the world, as indeed it was, for him.

Marta, having tenderly folded the tattered bill and laid it away in the locker, sat with crossed feet and slowly twiddling thumbs to listen, nodding her head from time to time, and occasionally remarking, "That's the way of it," or, "Aye, it would be."

"Gran'an," said Luke, and his heart again began to throb painfully as a daring thought occurred to him, "Wouldn't you like to see it, Gran'an? They'd let *you* in for nothing. They'd know *you're* circus."

"And let you in along of me, you cheeky young varmit?" said Marta, chuckling. "Well——"

"Oh *Gran'an!*" Luke poured out his whole soul in one long sighing breath. He leaned forward and put a small pleading hand on her knee. "I'd—I'd——" a lump rose in his throat, choking his utterance, "like to see it proper," he mumbled,

turning away his head, because his cheeks were scarlet again and there were tears of longing in his eyes.

"Mind you," said Marta, "Beckett's ain't no slap-up circus like what your grandad owned. Beckett's is only a two-penny half-penny gaff, though good enough in its own way, I dare say. But I'd like you to see a tip-top show for the first. If Lord George Sanger were round this way, now——"

"But, oh Gran'an, you know he isn't!"

"No, he's up to Scotland, hob-nobbing with 't Queen," said Marta. "Sakes, I reck'lect when I shook hands with a queen, but not our queen, she was——"

Luke stood up and kicked back the stool he was sitting on. He could bear the suspense no longer. His chest heaved. "I'm going home now," he almost wailed.

"Stop a minute, stop a minute!" Marta caught him by the shoulder and turned his flushed, clouded and wild little face round to her own. "Look me in the eyes, then, you silly little lad. Who said I wouldn't take you? You ain't no civilized boy, at all. the way you're all of a tantrum in a moment. I'll take you, if your mam'll let you go, but I'm suspicious that she won't. You go home and ask, and meet me at a quarter to eight on the tober—you know what that means?" Luke nodded. "On the tober, then, just inside of the gate, a quarter to and not a second after."

"I'll be there, I'll be there," shouted Luke ecstatically; he waved his hand and bounded out of the wagon.

Marta called him back. She was laughing at him again, but he didn't care now. *He was going to the circus*, not to sneak under the wallings as a thief, but to march in proudly as one who had a right to enter. *He was going!*

"What about these here presents?" said Marta. 'Don't you care nothing about 'em?'"

"Oh yes, I do, I do, Gran'an, only—I forgot."

"Lord Jesus, the lad's demented!" exclaimed Marta, rolling up her eyes in mock astonishment, as she hastily crammed the book on horses and the gingerbreads back into their brown paper. "Here, take 'em, and John's passel, too. Think I carried 'em half-over England to be spat on? And you never listened then 'to how I shook hands with a queen——"

"I can't, I can't, not now, there isn't *time*," babbled Luke. He snatched the parcels from her and made off across the yard.

Marta stood at the top of the wagon steps and beamed after his small flying figure. "That lad," she remarked to the universe at large, "he *is* a lad, and a proper 'un. He'll come, he'll be there, and he won't ask no permission from his mam, neither. Think I don't know that?" Marta winked at a chicken that was stretching its neck to drink from a dish on the foot-board. "Aye, he'll be there, all right," she said, as the little yard door slammed behind Luke. "And I don't blame him—so would I have been. Call him a flatty? I don't think so, no, I don't think so." Chuckling to herself, she went into the wagon to prod with a two-pronged fork at the boiling potatoes.

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## I I I

LUKE ran all along North Street, the narrow street of dismal little shops that stretched between Marta's yard and Camershaw Road. He turned into Camershaw Road at a run, too, and shot past the draper's at the corner, and past Mrs. Hunt's bakery that was next door to it, without turning his head to see if Elsie Hunt, a girl who went to the same school as himself and whom he secretly admired, was playing about in the shop, as she so often was. Indeed he scarcely gave Elsie a thought, but he pulled up just beyond the bakery, for all that. Number twenty was the Hunts' house, next door to the bakery, and number nineteen was his house. He pulled up to get his breath, to compose himself, and to consider a plan of action.

Marta was right in her surmise, Luke was not going to mention the circus to his mam. Of what use is it to ask permission, when you know beforehand that it will not be granted? No, but for the bad boy you know yourself to be, there are other ways. For you are going to the circus, of course, there is nothing in the world can stop you.

Camershaw Road sloped steeply uphill. The houses were built of red brick and, except for the two shops on the corner, were as like as peas in a pod. Downstairs each had a door with a brass knob, and a bow window; upstairs two windows; each had three white steps and a tiny patch of front garden fenced by an iron railing that ran the length of the street. All the windows had lace curtains, but some had venetian blinds, and some had roller blinds of cream-coloured holland. This, and the fact that some of the doors were painted green, and some a dull red, was the only break in the monotony of this, the most respectable street in the suburb. The houses were modern, too, each had a bathroom, thank goodness, and an indoor and outdoor water closet. What more did you want for ten shillings a week? The inhabitants of Camershaw Road considered themselves lucky, and looked down with a determined ferocity upon the inhabitants of North Street, where there were no bathrooms, and the closets were outside only, and where rats came into the

cellars from the river that flowed down the narrow valley from Endcliffe Fields. You didn't get rats in Camershaw Road; moreover, since the road climbed the hill, there was always air blowing down it from the moors which surrounded the town. You also got the sun, when there was any.

The houses on one side of the street got the sun in the afternoon, the houses on the other side got the sun in the morning. Numbers nineteen and twenty got it in the afternoon, it was shining brightly into Luke's face now, as he stood outside the railings of number twenty. The houses that stretched up hill at his back were glowing dusky red in its kindly beams, whilst across the street the shadows of roofs and chimneys lay over the pavement. With a sudden realization that he had no time to waste, Luke moved on again, opened the low iron gate of number nineteen, walked up the tiny length of asphalt path, turned the polished brass knob on the green-painted front door, and entered his home.

The whirr of the sewing machine from the back-room. Then silence. Then:

"Luke. That you, Luke?"

His mam's voice calling. His mam's voice sounding oh—so tired! Luke went along the passage, dragging his feet on the oilcloth, remembering he had a part to play.

She was sitting just as usual at the big table in the back-room. The big table had a green plush cloth on it, and it was covered with pins and cotton reels and pieces of material. The sewing machine was on the corner nearest the window, and his mam sat in front of it with her back to him. As he came in she turned round and took off her spectacles to gaze in reproach at her youngest son. Her face was pale as bone, her grey eyes big and weary looking, her nostrils rather pinched, her lips small and narrow. Her fair hair was already turning grey, though she was not more than thirty-eight. There was pathos in the face, and something of heroism, too, though Luke was unaware of either of these qualities. He was only vaguely conscious that most often when he stood in his mam's presence he knew what a bad boy he was, knew also that he couldn't help it, scarcely wished to help it, though he would have liked his mam to smile at him as Marta did.

" Luke, it's half-past six! John's had his tea an hour since. Where *have* you been?"

Lilian Castle's voice was soft and genteel. She sounded all her " h's," perhaps a little too emphatically, and she was careful to give such words as " fore-head " and " med-e-cine " their full value. She had a northern intonation, of course, but she tried—oh so hard—to speak like a lady, and behave like a lady, for her little sons' sakes.

" I went a walk, Mam," said Luke. " I've got the earache awful bad." He sat down and laid his head wearily on the pin-strewn tablecloth. " Can I go to bed, Mam? I don't want no tea."

" Oh dear, Luke, there's always something the matter! Have you been playing down by the river?"

" No, Mam."

" Well, go and get undressed and I'll hot some oil. What are those parcels?"

Luke winced. He had forgotten the parcels. He ought to have left them under the hat rack in the hall, then his mam need have known nothing about them till John told her. " Presents from Gran'an," he said unwillingly. " She's come home."

" So *that's* where you've been, you naughty boy! How often must I tell you—? No wonder you've got the earache!" A loose remark on Mrs. Castle's part, she only meant no wonder if he got anything and everything, considering the company he kept.

Luke said nothing, he merely groaned most realistically. His mam sighed and said again, " Go and get undressed." Then she went into the kitchen, where John sat at the window doing his homework. John was her pride and joy, he was just thirteen and he had won a scholarship to Whitfield Grammer School. He worked hard, he helped her in the house too, he was like herself, not only in looks, Mrs. Castle felt, but in character. She understood him, and she loved him. She didn't understand Luke, and, though she loved him too, of course, when she thought about him, she felt afraid. He was so quietly and determinedly wilful; already he defied her over going to see that terrible old gipsy aunt—and over other things too. " He doesn't care, he doesn't care about me," she thought, as she went into the

kitchen. "My own little son, and doesn't care. It's not natural." Then her eyes met John's, lifted from his book. Serious grey eyes, like her own, gazing out of a pale, tight-lipped little face. "*John cares, John understands,*" she thought with a rush of warm emotion. She felt she would do anything for John, gladly lay down her life if need be. . . .

"That Luke, Mam?"

"Yes, he's going to bed, he's got the earache."

"I do anything, Mam?"

"No, love, get on with your lessons. I'll just hot a drop of oil."

"Where's he been all this while, Mam?"

"With Marta Castelli."

"Oh—" John's eyes gladdened. That meant a present for him, there was always a present when old Marta came home. He wondered where it was? No, he mustn't ask, he mustn't show interest, his mam wouldn't like it. But he did wonder what Marta had brought him this time. It was so nice getting presents. He wished his mam would let him— No, he didn't really want to go and visit a dirty old gipsy woman, he wanted to do what his mam told him, to get on at school too, so that when he was a man he would earn good money. Then his mam wouldn't have to work so hard or get so tired. One day he would buy her a satin dress . . .

"*Magister pueris bonis libros dat.*" How difficult Latin was when you had to catch up with fellows who'd been learning it all their lives! He would catch up though, and beat them all at it, too. "*Libri pueros miseros hodie delectant.*" Marta sometimes brought him a book, she was clever in knowing what he would like, though mam said she couldn't read or write herself. Fancy, quite old, and couldn't read! Would Luke have left the parcel under the hat stand? No, don't think about that present, only think of Latin. "*Dominus fidei servis praemia dat . . .*"

In the little back bedroom, Luke was standing in his night shirt, pondering deeply. He jumped into bed and pulled the clothes up over his ears, when he heard his mam's tired-sounding feet kicking against the stair rods as she came up. Did he feel conscience-stricken when she gave him a cup of warm milk to drink, when she poured the hot oil into his ear and, gently

poking in the cotton wool, asked him if it hurt? Yes, indeed he did; even as he winced and assured her that it hurt *dreadfully*, he was telling himself what a wicked boy he was. And yet there seemed no help for this wickedness, and though he felt guilty, he also felt indignant, as if it was someone else's fault, not his—almost as if it was his mam's fault, though that, of course, was not possible.

Mrs. Castle moved over to the window, which was a small one and only opened at the bottom. Luke watched her anxiously.

"You needn't shut it, Mam, I'm hot."

She considered. "Yes, it is a warm night, but I'll put it down a little."

"No, Mam, no!"

"Yes, a little. There, you've a-plenty of air. And you better have your wool comforter."

She took a red knitted scarf from a drawer and tied it round Luke's head. He almost began to feel that his earache was real. He yawned loudly. "I'll go to sleep now, Mam."

"Very well. I'll peep in when I go to bed."

No, no, that would never do, Luke didn't want that. "You'll only wake me up," he cried fretfully.

That was true, at anyrate; Luke woke at the least thing. It was for this reason that he had the tiny back bedroom for his own, and did not sleep with John. Mrs. Castle would have liked that little room to keep her spare dressmaking materials in; now they had to be stowed away anywhere, under her own bed, which made cleaning difficult, or downstairs in the workroom, and that looked so untidy when customers came to be fitted. But Luke had to sleep by himself, because, if John disturbed him coming to bed, he would be wide awake in an instant, and as lively as if it were morning. That wasn't natural in a child, either. There were so many things about Luke that Mrs. Castle felt were not "natural."

"Very well. I'll just speak softly outside the door, and if you don't answer I'll know you're asleep."

"Yes, Mam."

"Earache easier?"

"Yes."



"Yes, *thank you*," corrected Mrs. Castle.

"Yes, thank you," repeated Luke meekly. Would she never go?

"And you think you'll sleep now?"

"Ye-es, Mam," Luke yawned again ostentatiously.

"Good-night, then."

"Goo- ni- Mam." Luke shut his eyes.

With a troubled, almost bewildered expression, Mrs. Castle stood for a moment, looking down at her youngest son. Always, sleeping or waking, there was something in his odd little face that eluded her. What was it? Why wasn't he like other children? Mrs. Castle sighed. Then, as Luke didn't open his eyes, she stooped to kiss the top of his scarf-swathed head, tiptoed out of the room, and softly closed the door.

Luke lifted his lids a little way, dropped them again, lifted them again. He unwound the scarf from his head, pulled the cotton wool out of his ear, and heard the stairs creak as his mam went down, heard her say something to John in the kitchen, heard the gurgle of running water as she rinsed the milk cup under the kitchen tap. Then more movement below, and then—drum, drum, drum, the steady rhythm of the sewing machine. Luke stealthily pushed back the clothes and stepped out of bed.

Carefully moving on bare feet, and without making a sound, he tiptoed to the door and made fast the little brass bolt, holding his breath with anxiety lest the bolt squeak or rattle. This was the first time in his life that he had bolted his bedroom door, but it had to be done, because then, if his mam broke her word and turned the handle, she would not be able to get in. She would only think, "What a naughty boy to lock himself in!" and then she would say, "Are you asleep, Luke?" And there would be no answer and she would go away. Or, maybe he would be back before she came upstairs, and in that case he would unbolt the door again.

With a calmness and lack of haste that was surprising, considering how excited he was, Luke put on his clothes, tucked a black wool sock methodically into each of his boots, tied the laces of the boots together and hung them round his neck. He had planned all this an hour ago when he stood outside by the railings. Now everything he must do was so clear in his mind that

he seemed to be watching himself, as if it were somebody else doing these things, somebody he had dreamed about, or read about in a book, so that with every step he took, whether to bolt the door or put on his clothes, or tiptoe, fully dressed, except for boots and socks, to the window, he could say to himself, "This has happened before." And having happened, there was of course nothing that could prevent it: it began with bolting the door, it would end with his meeting his gran'an at the gate of the circus field, nothing could stop him, nothing, nothing—he *was going to the circus!*

Luke's bedroom window and the bathroom window were side by side, and the drain-pipe ran down the wall between them. Underneath, only the pantry and the wash-house gave on this wall, the kitchen window being round at the side. It was all comparatively simple, the only fact that wasn't according to plan was Mrs. Castle's having shut down Luke's window rather farther than was convenient. He dared not open it another inch, although downstairs the sewing machine was going so hard that even the boards under his feet shook with tiny vibrations. But John was in the kitchen, and John had ears like a fox. No matter. Luke thrust his head and shoulders between the bottom of the window and the sill, and suffered a moment of pure panic when his humped-up behind refused to follow. Then he remembered some words of Marta's when she was describing the trick of an acrobat in getting through an impossibly small-looking hoop. "Wherever your head'll go the rest of you can follow. Knack, that's all that's needed." "I *can* get, because my head's through," thought Luke and relaxed his buttock muscles and wriggled and heard his brace buttons scrape against the window frame. "I can, I can," he breathed.

Yes, he had done it, and he had lost only one brace button in the doing. Once on the outside sill, with his arms round the drain-pipe, the rest was easy, he slid to the ground, rubbed a bare scraped ankle, ran through the back yard and out into the dry, rutty lane that sloped uphill parallel to Camershaw Road.

There was no one in the lane, except a few children playing hop-scotch away at the far end. Opposite the lane were fields, the same ones he had crossed earlier in the day on his way to Marta's wagon. In some of them there were ponies grazing, but

the nearest one was being kept for hay, there were poppies and dog-daisies growing amongst the grass, and the setting sun shone redly through the poppy petals and tinged even the white heads of the big daisies with a rosy sheen. Luke climbed over the fence and sat down behind some hazel bushes to put on his socks and boots, then, talking to himself, describing his movements as if he were reading from that book that was the "History of the Bad Boy, Luke," he went up across the field, over the green where the new houses were being built, down the tree-shadowed lane that was all mysterious now with the threat of approaching night, and so into the main road that led to Endcliffe Bottoms.

The road was full of people streaming towards the circus field, and away beyond the gate the band was already blaring. Here, in the bottoms, the sun had set, there were lights showing golden and frail in the misty distance beyond the hurrying people. The lights of the circus! Luke caught sight of them and lost them, and caught sight of them again, as he elbowed his way through the crowd, and the bodies of grown-up people swayed and parted across his angle of vision.

"You're in a hurry, lad, ain't you?"

"'Ere, who d'you think you're a-shoving off?"

"The circus won't run away, sonny!"

Their good-humoured protests were lost on Luke; the people he butted into, dodged round and pushed against, were to him only like the swaying branches of a dense wood through which a traveller must thrust his way to reach the country of his heart's desire. Luke was energetically talking to himself again.

"He went in through the gate and there he found Marta waiting," he murmured.

The story didn't go any further, what was to follow was too glorious to be imagined clearly. What was to follow had never happened before, it was still veiled from him in a haze of light that shone from the place where dreams come true.

Luke went in through the gate and found Marta waiting.

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## IV

MARTA was dressed in her best, she looked wonderful, her face, even, was three shades lighter than Luke had ever seen it, and she had replaced her jet bead earrings for long, tear-shaped drop-pers of pure gold. Her hair was arranged in neat, sausalike curls on the top of her head, and on top of the curls a black hat set at an acute angle was adorned with a green plume that curled coquettishly round the brim. A jaunty black cloth jacket, full sleeved and tight-waisted, was fastened with a row of very large, glittering steel buttons, and, from under the jacket, the skirts of a green-and-black flowered silk gown belled out into majestic folds above Marta's high kid boots. Indeed, the magnificence of the boots was largely obscured by the magnificence of the gown, except on one side where Marta had gathered up the folds with a gloved hand.

Yes, there were gloves, there were even gloves!

"So you got off all right?" said Marta.

"Yes, I——" Luke felt suddenly abashed. He had overlooked an important sentence in that chapter of the History of the Bad Boy Luke that concerned the Escape from the Bedroom. "Gran'an," he said, and his pouting lips twitched with concern, "I never thought—to put on me Sunday suit."

"We don't fash ourselves over trifles of them sort," said Marta cheerfully, as she took Luke by the hand.

"But you're so—grand," said Luke.

Marta gave a delighted cackle of laughter. "Well, you see, I thought I'd show 'em to-night. Oh, aye, Marta Castelli's a good old has-been. And mind you, Luke, that's a durn sight better than a never-was. You remember that, lad, all your life, and you won't do so bad. See the feather in me 'at? I'll tell yer something about that feather. It was Marcellin's once, he wore it on his head in the ring. Ah well, them days won't come back no more. God rest his faithful bones. Like some hokey-pokey or what else?"

"Ho-key pokey, penny a lump! Ho-key pokey, penny a

lump!" A pale ragged man with a hoarse voice went lurching past them, carrying a basket on each arm. "Milk chok-er-late, new and sweet! Only a penny, only a penny, milk chok-er-late!"

Marta spent sixpence. Luke had never tasted milk chocolate before, and it was horrid, he thought. But he was feeling half-sick with excitement, so perhaps that was the reason. And his heart was so full that he couldn't speak a word as, clutching his gran'an's gloved hand, he walked with her towards the big-top.

In front of the big-top there was a wooden platform backed by a coloured façade on which exciting scenes were painted. Life-size lady riders jumped through hoops, or pirouetted on one pointed toe on the backs of plumed and brightly caparisoned piebald horses. An enormous tiger, with claws like scythes, stood on its hind legs flattening its ears and showing its teeth at a man in a dress suit, with black hair and a ferociously curling moustache. Elephants gambled, monkeys walked the tight-rope, clowns in wide check trousers grinned and contorted, and writhing snakes of prodigious size hung from the branches of the trees whose over-arching boughs made an elegant finish to the scalloped edges of the façade. Luke had seen all this in the afternoon, of course, and every image on that façade, in all its woodenly grotesque and over-coloured vigour, was engraved in his heart. But now the whole was illumined by long, breeze-blown naphtha flares, so that the paint glistened and the figures trembled into a semblance of life: whilst, below the façade on the platform, figures that were not only alive but ecstatically and maddeningly so, danced, shouted, turned somersaults, stood on their heads, fired guns, waved swords, cracked whips and walked on their hands, whilst a band of six men in red coats blew into their brazen instruments and rattled on the drum to such effect that every other sound was drowned in the clamour.

There was a pony standing on its hind legs, there was a dog skipping with a lady in a ballet skirt, there was a clown cutting off his nose with a sword: drip, drip, drip, the red blood ran down over the blade, there was a darky dancing a war dance, there was a man in leather coat and trousers juggling with knives, there was little Anna, in the shortest possible dress of silver sequins, and with her hair tied up with an enormous white bow of ribbon, solemnly doing the splits, and giving the crowd the

same childish and disdainful look-over as she had given Luke earlier in the day.

"Walk up, walk up, walk up, the show is about to *commence!*"

The band stopped playing for old Sam Beckett to roar out these words. Old Sam had a wooden leg, he was ginger haired and deep-chested, and his voice was loud as a lion's and harsh as a crow's. "Walk up, walk up," he roared, thumping a great freckled fist against his palm, whilst the trumpeters turned their instruments upside down and shook out the moisture, and the drummer rubbed his thin fingers together and shut his eyes as if he were going to sleep.

"Walk up, walk up, walk up!" Old Sam Beckett was apoplectic in the face, the veins on his neck stood out with the vehemence of his shouting. "Walk up for the greatest show on earth, see the bear what wrestles with the famous *hex*plorer, Cap'n Pycroft." (Sam waved an arm towards the man with the leather breeches who juggled with knives.) "See the heliphants *a*-standing on their 'eads, see the wonder child rider of the world" (old Sam Beckett grasped little Anna by the shoulder and thrust her forward). "See the liberty hosses as has performed before the crowned 'eads of Heurope! Walk up, walk up, two shillings to the right, one shilling and also *ninepence* to the left, children half-price to *hall* parts, let the reserved ticket-holders pass first, *hif* you please!"

Surrounded by the crush of grown-up bodies, Luke hung on to Marta's hand, stood on the very tips of his toes and craned his neck. He was all eyes, all ears, tense with excitement. Then, still clinging to Marta's hand, he stumbled forward, urged by the press behind. Now he could see very little, but old Beckett's words went roaring like wildest music above his head. "Walk up, walk up, the show is about to *commence!*"

The crowd, moving towards the entrance ways, brought Marta and Luke close up under the platform. Suddenly Marta gave a wild shriek of delight.

"That little feller there in the leather breeches, him with the black whiskers, I'm durned if that ain't——"

The recognition was mutual. With a whoop Captain Pycroft

came vaulting off the platform and, flinging himself upon Marta, clasped her in his arms.

"The Castelli—it is—my dear and clever one—so many, many years!"

They kissed rapturously, over and over again, first on one cheek, then on the other. The thick grease paint on Captain Pycroft's face smeared Marta's lips, and Luke, pressed close to Marta, was also pressed close to Captain Pycroft and half-suffocated by the smell of warm, greasy leather that exuded from him.

"An old worn-out crook, Alphonse," he heard Marta exclaiming between the kisses.

"Oh no, oh no, the Castelli who first taught me to ride, the Castelli who nursed me so tenderly when I tumbled and slip my knee! My gentle, gentlest nurse, my so severe, severest teacher, always I must remember the Castelli!"

"And a good job somebody does," said Marta, beaming, as Alphonse, with his arm still round her, drew her up the steps towards the pay-box.

"The best seats for the Castelli and her little—what is he—grandson? Yes? No? A royal box, but we have it not, only the velvet covers and the so very lumpy cushions. Not good enough, no, by no means." Talking incessantly in a soft caressing voice, Alphonse steered Marta to the pay-box. "See, Mamma Beckett," he said to the stout dark-haired woman who sat within. "I have just found 'er, my dearest, oldest friend, the *cele-brated* Castelli."

Mamma Beckett thrust a bejewelled hand through the aperture of the pay box. "Pleased to meet yer," she said, with husky geniality.

But Luke ducked behind Marta's skirts, for that very afternoon this bejewelled hand, that looked so chubby and inoffensive and yet could grip so hard, had seized him by the shoulder and turned him out of Paradise, whilst that same husky voice had shouted—and by no means genially, "Luke Castle! My God, I'll give you Luke Castle!"

So Luke Castle ducked and tried to hide himself, but only for an instant. Then his pride returned to him as he remembered who, in reality, he was. When, that afternoon, she had so

ferociously asked his name, he should not have said, "Luke Castle" but "Lucio Castelli," then the woman would have known and bowed him into one of the best seats, on to a velvet cover with a so very lumpy cushion.

He came from behind Marta and tugged at her elbow. "Lucio Castelli, Gran'an," he said in an imploring whisper, "I'm Lucio Castelli."

"And this is my great-nephew, Lucio Castelli," said Marta with instant understanding, and Luke, standing erect before the pay-box and holding up a whole queue of impatient people, looked Mamma Beckett unflinchingly in the eyes and held out his hand.

"Pleased to——" began Mamma Beckett, then she went off into a raucous peal of laughter. "You little devil," she exclaimed, "you cute little devil!"

The queue behind was getting restive, with a wave of dismissal and a "see you later" from Mamma Beckett, Luke and his gran'an were shepherded by Alphonse into the big-top and introduced to the elephant keeper who was taking tickets, and to the equestrienne who was selling programmes, and to the lady tight-rope walker who was selling nuts and oranges, and chocolate drops beaded with white sugar.

"My heart is full—full," said Alphonse, as he led them to the best seats. These seats were just planks, like all the others, but they were roped off, draped with blue velvet and strewn with cushions of diverse shapes and colours: not very grand perhaps, but grand beyond all grandeur in the eyes of Luke. Here, like a king and queen, who enter freely and in their own right, sat Luke and Marta, side by side, whilst, outside the entrance ways, the band again struck up its intoxicating music, and all round them the rest of humanity streamed in to fill the inferior places, children running and pushing and clambering over the seats, parents calling anxiously, young men with their sweethearts on their arms, old men and women looking as pleased and excited as children themselves.

Luke, whose blissful state of mind was beyond comparing his so recent ignominy with his present honour, heaved a long, happy sigh of utter fulfilment, and gazed up at the over-arching tent already dark against the double string of naphtha lamps



that illumined the ring. So to the blessed must the lights of heaven shine against the eternal roof.

Curled up on a cushion at Marta's side, Alphonse was talking. He had his arm through hers, and his painted face, with its small dark eyes and delicate feminine features, was alight with eagerness. "No, Castelli, dear friend, I ride no more. I slip my knee another time. Since then I wrestle the bear only. The big grizzly he will one day kill little Alphonse—yes, I know it. I dream that he sook my sroat. But till that day, I wrestle him. I also throw the knives." He smiled, winningly, at Marta, and stroked the dark hair that fringed his cheeks. "And I grow the whiskers to make me look very, very tough guy."

"Whiskers or no, you ain't changed a 'apporth, lad," said Marta, squeezing his arm.

"Yes, but I change from young étoile to old man," insisted Alphonse, shaking his head dolefully. "I have over forty years. Ah, and I must tell you—I have a wife. She is a German mädchen, but she speak all languages. She is clever, more clever than poor Alphonse. She rides the high school, but now she is—how do you say—? too gross—*enceinte*. So she stand and I throw the knives at her. We do our best and Mamma Beckett is very kind." Again the ingratiating, pleading smile. "I will fetch my pretty wife to show to the great Castelli—yes?"

"Aye, lad," said Marta, "you fetch her, and look sharp about it."

Alphonse sidled off. Marta sniffed, folded her gloved hands one over the other and looked about her. "That were a young feller I learned to ride in the last year at Castelli's," she explained to Luke. "Fancy his reck'lecting! He waren't but a little lad. He stood on me shoulders in a trick act, dressed up as a gal. But he had giddy fits in hot weather, that's how he come to fall. Never make a rider, he wouldn't. Eh, Luke!"

"Yes, Gran'an?"

"I'd give me eyes, so I would, for you to have seen your grandad's circus, with me in me pride, and your grandad toffed up in his dress suit and kid gloves. *He* didn't stand bawling outside of his show, like some people. Not but what this is a tidy little chat, but—you know what I mean."

"Yes, Gran'an." Luke understood, of course, that there

never had been and never could be, another circus like Castelli's.

Marta shifted her lean buttocks on the lumpy cushion. "In tip-up seats, red plush with gilt crowns on their backs, aye that's where you'd have been sitting at Castelli's," she said dreamily. "And that band, well—but there, it does its best, I suppose."

The bandsmen had come into the tent now. Seated in a box-like erection that was draped with Union Jacks, near the back entrance, they were thumping out such popular tunes as "Sweet Rosy O'Grady" and "The Honeysuckle and the Bee." Alphonse came gliding back, leading by the hand a pleasant-looking, yellow-haired young woman, who was wearing a loose mantle to conceal her pregnant condition. Marta and she were soon chatting like old friends. Mamma Beckett came to talk to Marta, other people came, old Beckett himself, and several handsome sons and daughters, some of them sandy-haired like their father, and some dark like their mother, but all handsome, upright, alert and proud in bearing. Marta had quite a reception; all through the evening those performers who were not in the ring drifted towards the best seats to talk to her about the changing times and to ask questions about the old days at Castelli's. They kept up a continual chattering and laughing, to the slight irritation of those few plutocrats who were patronising the two shilling lumpy cushions. Marta became gayer and gayer, her voice rang out loudly, and her laugh resounded whether there was anything to laugh at or not. She was holding court, she was living over again the triumphs of her youth, she was no longer even the most valiant of worn-out old crocks, she was the young, the gifted, the daring, the vivacious, the irresistible Marta Castelli—the Castelli.

"I do believe that old woman's drunk," whispered a lady in the seat behind.

"Hush my dear, hush, she'll hear you."

"She couldn't possibly. But it is *rather* disgraceful, isn't it?"

With head slightly forward, eyes round and staring, and lips parted, Luke sat and gazed at the ring. Through the entire evening he scarcely moved a muscle. Now and then one of Marta's new friends would address an encouraging word to him, but he answered, if at all, mechanically and without really hear-

ing what was said. He was in the ring with the satiny horses, in the ring with the acrobats, in the ring with the elephants, in the ring with little Anna's mother, the glittering lady on the trapeze, who seemed to have no joints, or to be all joints, in the ring with little Anna, standing gravely on her sedately trotting pony and holding out her two hands to the cheering audience, in the ring with the ridiculous clowns, though he did not laugh at their jokes, no, no, he was seriously making those jokes himself, not laughing at them.

Mrs. Alphonse nudged Marta Castelli. "He's drinking it all in, *nicht wahr?*?"

Marta Castelli winked and nodded at Mrs. Alphonse. "Aye, he's crazy on it. In the blood, see? His mam'll have trouble with him, by and by, and I don't wonder at it. These flatties they're asking for it when they couple up with circus stock. You know, she's one of these 'ere pious cock-ups. Good enough in her way, I s'pose, but it ain't our way . . . Hey lad, Luke lad, stand on your feet, there's 'God Save the Queen'!"

Marta's strong bony hand pushed his elbow, Luke sighed and stood up, dazed. The performance was over.

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## V

THE crowd of spectators had dispersed into the mild, starlit night, taking their way towards the lights of Whitfield, where their snug little homes and their cosy beds awaited them: every home with a safe, familiar smell, so different from the alien smell of sawdust and animal flesh; every bed, with its familiar softness or hardness, waiting in its familiar corner in the large or small room behind the curtained windows. To-night—the circus; to-morrow—business, school, housework, the familiar routine of day-after-day, going in and out of the same front or back door, treading the same pavements, passing the same lamp-posts, the same street corners, the same grocers and butchers, meeting the same faces, discussing the same things, with just a memory of Beckett's circus to set them laughing and talking of something different for a few days, before the memory of it became fogged over by the thought of more important and immediate concerns.

By the time the clocks in Whitfield chimed midnight, there were only two people out of that crowd of spectators who were not abed and asleep—old Marta and young Luke.

Marta was in the Lorraines' wagon, having supper with Mrs. Alphonse, Luke hovered about the starlit field, which was now a scene of furious activity. Beckett's was opening in Mattadale to-morrow, and Mattadale was twenty miles away: there was the show to be built up on arrival, and a parade of the town to be got through before the *matinée*, therefore Beckett's must travel through the night.

Entranced—for was it not a performance equally as important as the performance in the ring?—Luke watched the bustle of departure: the packing of properties, the taking down of the horse tents and elephant tent and, most interesting of all to him, the dismantling and pulling down of the big-top, over which business every male member of Beckett's worked at a run, the naphtha flares illumining their perspiring faces and casting on the bright green grass a moving mimicry of grotesque shadows, as

the men hurried to and fro with their burdens of poles, planks, ropes, stakes, wallings and tilting. The still night air was full of the sounds of hammering, shouting, whistling, cursing and singing, and the ring of harness as the draught horses were hitched to the packed wagons and lorries.

Alphonse, streaming with sweat, ran across to his wagon to wash off his make-up. Mrs. Alphonse stood in the doorway and called to Luke. "Aren't you coming in with us to have supper?" she asked.

"Please, I'd rather stay out," said Luke.

So Mrs. Alphonse went in again and soon reappeared with a sandwich of bread and cheese and a mug of tea.

"Here, put that in your belly," she said.

Luke sat on the wagon steps, but he didn't feel hungry. He put down the sandwich on his left hand and the mug on his right, rested his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands. He felt tired, oh so tired and sad, but he must not miss anything.

The naphtha flares were put out, wagon lamps glowed yellow in the darkness, far away in Whitfield a church clock struck one. Luke still sat on the wagon steps with the untouched sandwich on one side of him and the mug of cold tea on the other. Going, going, going: one by one, with creaking of wheels and groaning of springs, with rattle and clatter of high-piled loads and the soft thud of hoofs on the grass, the lorries were driven past Luke, out of the field and away into the unknown. On soundless feet, the elephants passed him, their keeper, in buffalo-bill hat and fur waistcoat, moving at their head with a lantern and talking to them in a soft, outlandish voice. The ring horses passed him, a procession of lovely shadows in the night, some ridden, some roped together behind the wagons. The living wagons passed him, the drivers yawning and cracking their whips, the folk inside doubtless already asleep with their bodies swaying to the jolt of the wheels. The monkey wagon passed him, the bear wagon, the troupe of dogs, barking, wagging their tails and lifting their noses to snuffle the night air. Going, going, going, all the glitter and the magic of the circus, clattering away through the outskirts of Whitfield and lumbering up over the steep moorland roads to the next pitch—and leaving Luke behind.

Now there were only two wagons left in the field; in one of

them a couple of young acrobats were entertaining some pick-ups from the town, in the other Marta and Mr. and Mrs. Alphonse were celebrating their reunion over a bottle of whisky. Luke still sat on the steps, his eyelids were weighted down with sleep, but he did not want to go home, or even to go into the Lorraines' wagon. By and by, Alphonse, coming out to harness his two heavy-bodied piebalds, stumbled against him.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed, "the little grand-nephew!"

Guiltily, Luke emptied away the tell-tale cold tea and stuffed the sandwich into a pocket. Alphonse pulled him to his feet and drew him inside the wagon.

"The little grand-nephew," he repeated. "I think we have forgotten him."

"Just about we had," said Marta with a chuckle.

The whisky bottle was empty, Marta's eyes were very bright, and whenever she spoke she had a job not to laugh. Mrs. Alphonse was lying on the bed, already half-asleep.

"Listen, lad," went on Marta. "You can find your way home all right?"

"Yes," answered Luke, blinking at the lamplight and at Marta's brilliant eyes.

"Because I've decided to go with me friends for a day, or a couple of days," said Marta. "And here's something for you." She fumbled in her large black plush reticule and brought out a shilling. "And you might let out the chickens for me in the morning, Luke, and give 'em a measure of corn. The corn's in the tin box under the wagon—you know—and this here is the key to the padlock." Again she fumbled in the reticule. "If I'm not back by evening, you might feed 'em again and shut 'em up. Be a good boy, and when I do come back I'll bring you a present. You should come along as well, only your mam would set the police on us. You ain't going to cry, are you?"

"N-no, Gran'an."

"That's my good lad. Now you best skidaddle, because we're off d'reckly the hosses is in."

"I'll watch you go, please, Gran'an."

"All right, all right. Put them glasses in the cupboard then, and throw the bottle outside, for Frieda, poor soul, is about

dead to the world, and what packing's left to do must be done by me."

Mrs. Alphonse gave an amiable smile, muttered something in German, shut her eyes and immediately snored. Marta busied herself putting away cups, plates and anything that might roll from its place and smash with the jolting of the wagon. Alphonse looked in at the door and said, "Are we all ready?"

Luke kissed Marta and went out of the wagon. Alphonse unhooked the steps, lifted them inside and closed the door. Then he shook hands with Luke and took his seat on the footboard. Having gathered up the reins, he stooped and peered down at Luke.

"It is very late," he said gently, "for one so young. Is it far that you have to go home?"

"Oh no," answered Luke, with a proud assumption of indifference. "Just the bottom of the road. I'm about all hours, I am."

"Then good-bye," said Alphonse. "One day, perhaps we meet again."

"Good-bye," said Luke valiantly. He stood feet apart, hands in pockets, to watch the dark bulk of the wagon jolt away across the starlit field. He put back his head and tried to whistle, as if he were the happiest boy in the world. But the whistling was a melancholy failure, and, as the wagon turned to go through the gate, Luke, looking at the lamp that softly illumined the rounded croup of the near piebald, saw the yellow glow of the lamplight aureoled by his winking tears.

Angrily drawing his fist across his eyes, for he felt it shameful to be a cry-baby, even in the dark, Luke kicked at the grass, first with one foot, then with the other, trying to persuade those unwilling feet that it was now their duty to carry him home to bed. But the feet only walked him here and there about the field, taking him to stare at the dimly shining ring of sawdust where the big-top had been, and at the scatter of soiled straw, little piles of kitchen rubbish, little heaps of manure, and scraps of waste paper that were strewn over the field. There was the empty bottle he had thrown out of the Lorraines' wagon. The bottle lay on its side, it had caught the reflection of a bright star on one point of its glassy surface and it was glittering bravely.

Almost it seemed to be laughing at Luke. "Circus?" it seemed to be saying. "Not you. You can't even sparkle. You're a flatty."

Luke stamped on the bottle, once, twice, three times, then, since it would not break, he kicked it in front of him towards the hedge, where the one remaining wagon stood, with a harnessed horse beside it, tethered to a wheel.

It was a little wagon, high pitched and insecure-looking. Light shone behind the flowered window curtain and from inside came the rumble of masculine voices, followed by shrill screams of female laughter. Then the wagon rocked perilously, the door flew open, and two laughing young men lifted two giggling girls down the steps.

The young men Luke had seen doing tumbling tricks in the ring, wearing cream coloured vests and tights and billed as the "Famous Levant Brothers." But later, in their dressing-gowns, they were introduced to Marta as Bobby and Billy Gough. They had funny, good-humoured little faces, very much alike, and flaxen hair, worn long and shining with grease. When they came to talk to Marta, Luke had not taken much notice of them, being so busy possessing the whole circus in his mind; now, from the shadow of the hedge, he gazed at them longingly, as the one remaining link between himself and Beckett's.

Bobby lit a lantern. Billy said, "Gawd, it's cooler out here!" The girls straightened their big hats and shook out their long skirts. "I'll catch it, when I get home," one of them remarked.

"Catch it?" exclaimed the other. "I'll be *murdered*, if me Dad's awake!"

They linked arms with Bobby and Billy, and, with a hop, skip, and jump, they ran off, four abreast, across the field. The lantern swung wildly in Bobby's hand. Luke watched the men's bounding legs and the girl's twirling skirts, that flashed and faded as the light swung, heard snatches of song, saw them, in the lantern light, embracing at the gate.

"Good-night." "Good-night." "See you again some day." "Au revoir." "Don't forget us, mind." The words were interspersed by kiss-throwing and laughter.

Luke, who even now couldn't bear the thought of going home,



plucked some blades of grass and thrust them under the nose of the drowsy horse. "Kip, kip, kip," he said, and made a soft noise in his throat, in imitation of horse language. He leaned his head against the horse's shoulder, patted its neck and said, "I wish you belonged to me, I do, that."

Bobby and Billy came marching and singing back towards the wagon.

"My lass she looked up with a tear in her eye,  
Fol de rol, fol de rol,  
Says 'Sure, and I'm broken-hearted.'  
Says I, 'My lass, now why must yer cry?  
If we didn't of met, we couldn't of parted.'  
Fol de rol,

*Billy.* De iddely ol,

*Bobby.* De iddley ol,

*Billy.* De iddel . . ."

Luke stood uncertain whether to go or stay. Whilst he hesitated the lantern light fell on him.

"Hullo!" said Bobby.

"Who's you?" said Billy.

"Time yer was in bye-byes, ain't it?" said Bobby.

"I'll help you hitch-up," said Luke eagerly, and stopped to untie the tethering rope.

"That's right, make yerself useful," said Billy.

Bobby laughed. "You're a comical one. Thinking of joining us, was yer?"

Luke's heart leaped, and then seemed to stop beating. "You—want er—boy?" he said tremulously.

"Now you're talking," said Billy.

"But it all depends," said Bobby, "on what you can do."

"Can do anything, most," cried Luke in a choking voice, for it seemed one of those crises when self-praise is justified. "Can harness a horse and—and drive him, can stand on me head, walk on me hands, turn cart wheels——"

"Can you do cuts-and-catches, long arm, twisters, back to catch?" interrupted Bobby.

"Toes off, benders, flip-flaps, headspring, hand-spring, neck-spring?" added Billy.

"No," muttered Luke, who had never heard of any of these feats.

"That's a pity," said Bobby, with mock solemnity.

"Because, of course, we can't have a boy round us what can't do the flip-flaps," said Billy.

Luke looked at the ground. Oh God! here was his chance, and he was losing it because he had not been properly educated. Suddenly he looked up and called out in a desperate voice, "I can't do 'em, because nobody's shown me how. But I *will* do 'em, if you'll give me a chance. I'll practise all day and all night, till I can. Gawd blimme if I don't!"

(Oh what language! What would his mam have said, could she have heard him? But Luke was beyond caring.)

Bobby and Billy laughed uncomfortably. The little fellow was in such deadly earnest. It was a shame, perhaps, to be pulling his leg. "Tell yer what," said Bobby, "you go home and ask yer mammy. If she says 'yes,' it's yes."

"But if she says, 'no,' well, naturally, it's no," said Billy.

"She will say 'yes,'" gasped Luke.

"Then you go home and pack your bag," said Bobby.

"And don't forget to put in some muscle oil," said Billy.

"And you can join us in—Timbuctoo, ten years from now," called Bobby, for Luke was already making off across the field.

"Beats me what kids see in us," said Billy, as he backed the horse between the shafts. He gave a loud yawn. "Christ, I could do with a sleep! All the same, I don't know as we ought to of made game of him."

"He'll be thinking of something different to-morrow," said Bobby cheerfully. "Most like he'll get a spanking—he would if he was my kid, I know. Say Bill, pity we couldn't have taken them two donas along. That small one, she didn't arf smell nice."

So, discussing their lady friends, they hurriedly made ready for departure, and went on their way, forgetting Luke.

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## V I

MATTADALE. Six o'clock in the afternoon. The circus pitch strangely quiet. The matinée performance not long over, and all the members of Beckett's in their tents and wagons having tea.

Inside the small, top-heavy, green wagon Bobby and Billy Gough were seated at a table under the window. There were sardines on the table, and jam, and cheese, and on a saucer perched a canary pecking at a lump of sugar.

"Can you beat it?" said Bobby. "There was a gajo at the day-show what asked me——"

The sound of feet urgent and floundering on the steps outside, a bang on the door so imperative that Bobby, without finishing his sentence, leaped to open it, a small boy lurching in carrying a bulging portmanteau tied up with string, a small boy mud-stained, dusty, dishevelled, with a pale face, matted hair and torn overcoat, a small boy who reeled with weariness, yet whose eyes shone with the triumph of achievement.

"I've come!" cried Luke, in a breaking but exultant voice.

Bobby stared. Billy stared. The canary flew up and fluttered under the low-arched ceiling.

"Come?" said Bobby.

"Where from?" asked Billy.

"From Whitfield," panted Luke. "You know last night you said——"

"Christ!" exclaimed Bobby. "So we did!"

"But we never thought as how you'd come," said Billy.

"That was a joke, you see," explained Bobby.

"No!" cried Luke in anguish. "It wasn't a joke, it wasn't, it wasn't!"

"I'm sorry, kid," said Bobby, "but it was."

"Kid's sore," said Billy to Bobby. "I told you we shouldn't of——"

"You shut up," said Bobby. "What's your name, kid?"

"Lu— Lucio Castelli," answered Luke, whose world was

shattered. "You—you said as how you wanted—wanted a boy—you said I might, I might if—if—you said go home and pack and—and——" He gazed wildly from Bobby to Billy. Billy was frowning, Bobby's face was contorted as if he were going to laugh, to laugh at him and send him away. It was impossible, he couldn't, he wouldn't believe it. "I'll—I'll work good if you——" he began, and then could say no more. There was a hot, suffocating feeling in his throat, a tightness in his chest, he bit his lip and dug his nails into his clenched hands, as the dreadful realization came to him that he was on the point of crying.

"Try a sardine?" said Billy sympathetically, and handed Luke one laid tastefully on a cube of bread and butter. "No? A drink of tea then? You'll need something after your long journey. No? Nothing doing in the food line? Then say, how did you get here?"

"I—I walked——" began Luke with an effort. "And then I got a—a ride—in—in a cart."

"And when did you start?" asked Billy.

"Last night," answered Luke.

"Last—Gor blimme, you poor little bastard!"

At sound of Billy's kind words Luke almost broke down. It was Bobby's sharp question that steadied him. "Did your mother say as how you might come?"

"I—never—asked her," muttered Luke.

"Then you're a bad boy," said Bobby indignantly. "What d'you take us for? A couple of baby-snatchers? Didn't we tell you last night only if your mammy said yes?"

"But she never would say yes," cried Luke desperately. "You don't know my mam, she's—she's a flatty!"

At this announcement Bobby bellowed with laughter and Billy shouted, "Shut up, you unfeeling pudding-head!" and punched him good and hard, turning his back on Luke to conceal his own laughter.

Bobby countered with a playful straight left to Billy's face, Billy replied with a rabbit punch, Bobby with a right cross, Billy with a rib punch, Bobby with a hook to the jaw; they were now laughing and punching each other and leaping about from end to end of the narrow wagon.

For a few moments Luke, excited by the contest, forgot his bitter disappointment. "Whack-whack!" The clean blows fell harmlessly on the iron-muscled bodies. Like a cock at sunrise Luke's spirit clapped its wings and crowed. "Hurrah, hurrah, hur-ra-ah!" Whilst, perched on the curtain rail, the canary began to sing piercingly. Then the sparring match ended as suddenly as it had begun. Panting and giggling, Bobby and Billy rolled together on the bed.

"But I don't know what we're going to do with the runaway, and that's Gawd's truth," said Billy, sitting up. "He'll have to be got home some road. Hold on, kiddliwink, did you say you was called Castelli?"

Luke nodded. He had thought to work for them and they were treating him like a baby! They were going to send him "home," back to 19 Camershaw Road, which he had hoped to have left for ever. He was so near to tears again, that he could not trust himself to speak.

"Relative to the old dona what's on the show now?"

Luke nodded.

"Then you come along of me," said Billy, opening the door. He took Luke firmly by the arm and marched him across to the Lorraines' wagon.

Marta and Mr. and Mrs. Alphonse were comfortably settled over their tea. The table looked much the same as Bobby's and Billy's, only instead of sardines and cheese there was ham and tinned apricots, and instead of a canary on a saucer there was a cat sitting up on its hind legs, clawing at a long shred of ham fat that Mrs. Alphonse dangled above its tilted nose.

"Something what belongs to you, I think," said Billy, walking Luke into the wagon.

"Luke!" exclaimed Marta, staring as if she saw an apparition. "God above! How in hell did you get here?"

"He walked—and he rode," said Billy.

"But what do you *want*?" asked Marta, who didn't seem at all pleased to see Luke.

"He wants a job along of us," said Billy, for Luke couldn't bring himself to utter a word. "You see, last night he was hanging around, and one of us asked him in a joke like, was he thinking of joining us. But, then, naturally——"

"You chump," cried Marta indignantly, "you durned little chump!"

And then and there, she began to rate Luke as she had never rated him before. It seemed that he had spoilt all her plans and pleasures, for she had been meaning to stay for a week, and now she would have to take him home immediately. And had he considered what his mother must be feeling, and what use, any road, did he consider a bit of a lad like himself could be to Billy and Bobby, or to any one else on Beckett's Circus? Was he balmy, or what, that he couldn't distinguish between something said in joke, and something meant in earnest? Now, because he hadn't had enough gumption to understand a joke, every one must be put about. So Marta scolded on, until Alphonse, who had been gazing thoughtfully at Luke's dejected little figure, laid a hand on Marta's, pressed it, and said winningly, "If you please, Castelli—he is so very young."

"Oh well," said Marta, softened at once, "so he is. But he's got to learn sense, same as everybody else, hasn't he. Once he gets an idea into his nut, it ud take a team of elephants to get it out again. Travelling all that way, did you ever hear the like?" (Her voice had a note of pride now). "But the Castellis are like that, you can't daunten 'em. Leastways you couldn't in my young days. Come on, Luke, we'll be going."

"He shall have some tea first," said Mrs. Alphonse, who had been quietly setting a place for Luke at the table. "And you, Castelli, shall finish yours. Move up, Alphonse."

So Luke sat at the table and had tinned apricots, a delicacy he was so very partial to, that even his grief refused to let them choke him.

After that, Mrs. Alphonse brushed the mud off him, and gave him a bowl of water to wash his hands and face, and combed his tousled, dusty hair, and pinned up the rent in his overcoat. "Now you look more as you should," she said, and gave him a kiss, which upset him more than ever, for it was evident that she looked upon him merely as a tired, unhappy baby.

And then Marta put on her hat with the green plume, and followed by Luke, went from wagon to wagon, bidding her friends good-bye. And in each wagon the story of Luke's escape had to be told afresh, and whether the story was received

with laughter, or with exclamations of surprise and pity ("You don't say—Poor little feller!") it was all one to Luke, his humiliation was boundless.

In the last wagon which they visited, Tommy Beckett, the Cossack rider, was lying on his bunk with his hands behind his head, and a powerful white arm and shoulder showing through a rent in his shirt. Roxana Beckett, little Anna's mother, the dark, glittering lady who did dislocations on the trapeze, clothed now in a rather bedraggled blouse and skirt, was sitting by the open window, stitching some white satin into the tiniest daintiest pair of pumps imaginable for her small daughter. Little Anna, herself, was standing on a chair, absorbed in sticking goose quills in her hair and marking the effect in a wall mirror. Anna's presence was particularly galling to Luke; he remembered what she had called him yesterday, and how her tongue had flicked in and out, deriding him. Would she put out her tongue now? If so, perhaps this time he would *have* to hit her, even though it would but add to his shame and disgrace. But Anna took not the slightest notice of him, she just went on earnestly adorning herself, whilst Marta yet again told the story of Luke's misdemeanour. Marta, by this time, had recovered her good temper. Luke's adventure seemed to amuse her, she chuckled a lot and embellished the story with fancy touches of her own. But she referred to Luke as "that chump" or "this 'ere little fathead," and for Luke her humour was worse to bear than her indignation had been.

Anna's father laughed indolently. Anna's mother gave a pitying smile and said, "Fancy! Travelling all that way, too!" Anna's father turned his handsome head towards Luke and remarked, "You'll have to go home and grow some muscle, sonny." Anna's mother bit off a length of cotton, looked at Luke's anguished face, and said, as if to console him, "You wouldn't like it, you know, if you was allowed to stop, not really you wouldn't."

Not like it? It was anger now, as well as grief, that kept Luke dumb. These daring, wonderful people could not understand that he was circus as much as they were, they were laughing at him, pitying him, telling him to go home as if he was an ordinary lad, as if no drop of the Castelli blood flowed in his

veins. He wanted to rage at them, make them understand, justify himself, he felt choked with shame and humiliation.

Anna, having stuck all the goose quills in her hair, breathed on the glass, then licked it and peered at the reflection of her tongue. Then she jumped off the chair, fetched a box of white powder, climbed up again, and began industriously smearing her cheeks. Not even when Luke, having mumbled good-bye, followed Marta out of the wagon, did Anna so much as glance at him. You would have said that, intent on her own amusing game, she had heard and noticed nothing of what was going on. But as, to an accompaniment of Marta's semi-satirical, semi-affectionate gibes and ejaculations, Luke was leaving the field, he heard a shrill voice behind him, calling, "Boy! 'Ey, boy! I've something for yer!" And there was Anna tugging at his sleeve.

The goose quills stuck out of her hair in all directions, like a kind of drunken halo, and the patches of powder on her cheeks gave her an odd and clownish appearance. But, as she gazed up into Luke's face, her big, dark eyes, under the feathers and the dusky curls, were very solemn, yet friendly. She took Luke's hand, pressed something small into the palm, and closed his fingers over it. "It's lucky," she said earnestly. "Don't lose it, will yer?" Then she ran off again.

Luke opened his hand, and there was a tiny coin, a silver fourpenny bit, smooth-polished and fragile with age. He had never seen such a thing before, and it struck him as extraordinarily rare and precious. "It's lucky." As Luke's hand closed over the coin again, a forlorn sob shook his tired body. Anna's gesture of friendliness was curiously consoling, but it was also, in some strange way, more unnerving than all the disappointments of that eventful day.

Luke and Marta went home by train. Marta had recovered from her annoyance at having to leave her friends, and she was now ready to regard Luke's delinquency with a large tolerance, even with some secret admiration. But what touched and reconciled her completely was the news that Luke, before setting out, had remembered to leave a note asking John to see to the chickens, which, in her first moments of concern, she had pictured cooped up and starving.



"But you're for it, mind, when you reach home," she said suddenly to Luke, who, with the portmanteau at his side, sat in a corner seat opposite her, staring out of the window, and seeing neither the quickly flashing telegraph poles, nor the slowly sliding hills, but an image of a striped tent, with two flags on it, moving farther and farther and farther away.

"I know," answered Luke. He looked dreamily at Marta, his blue eyes were veiled and distant. Hidden in his overcoat pocket, the forefinger and thumb of his right hand held the tiny coin that Anna had given him. Slowly his thumb revolved over the smooth surface, round and round, round and round; he was thinking deeply, but his thoughts were like waves rolling on and on, not one of them stayed with him.

"You don't seem particular fashed about it," observed Marta. "Don't you mind grieving your mam?"

"Yes," said Luke, "I do." He sighed. It was all a nuisance. He didn't want his mother to cry, and she would cry, he knew, and he would look at the tired lines about her mouth and eyes and be uncomfortably conscious that every one of those lines had, in some mysterious way, been put there by himself. Not by John, only by him. He was, and always had been, a 'drag' on his mam. He minded the fact, but he was used to it. He was not now thinking of his home-coming in terms of rebuke or punishment, he was thinking of his failure in what he had set out to do, and of Marta's taunt that he hadn't enough gumption to distinguish between joke and earnest.

Something he had to learn. *What* was it? From now on you must never believe anything that anybody said: was that it? No, it was not as easy as that; it was that somehow you must find out how not to be a balmy chump who hadn't enough gumption——

"You're a hard little nut in some ways," said Marta, who had been pondering on this matter of Luke's seeming indifference to his mother's feelings. "Howsomever, better be hard than soft. Soft, like as not, means rotten at the core. No, I ain't reproachin' you," she went on, after narrowing her brilliant eyes at Luke. "But if you don't care a hurrah-in-hell for what's ahead of us, I can tell you, I do. And if it wurn't that you'd given a

thought to them chickens, I'd bid you good-night on your own doorstep and leave you to face the racket alone."

Not knowing what answer to make to this outburst, Luke made none. And, after that, little more was said between them until, in a summer darkness that smelled of dust, they reached Camershaw Road, and stood together on the clean white steps that led up to the Castles' front door.

"Now mind," said Marta in an undertone, as she turned the polished door-knob, "if I back you up it don't mean that you ain't an aggravating little varmit. It's only because——"

But Luke never knew what his gran'an had been going to say, because, at that moment, the door flew open, and there was his mam, with her face all white and dreadful looking.

"Luke, Luke, Luke! Oh Luke, what does this mean? I thought you were dead, I thought you'd got killed, how could you, how cou—ould you?" Luke's mam burst into tears.

Marta said, "Well let's get in, any road," and walked past her down the passage into the back room. Mrs. Castle followed. John came bounding downstairs in his night-shirt; he was a good boy, he didn't say anything, he kept a serious face and waited for his mam to speak.

"And I might have known *you* were at the bottom of it!" cried Mrs. Castle, turning on Marta. "I can't help it if you are my aunt-in-law. I'll say what's the truth, it's always you leading the boy astray."

"Now listen here, Lilian Castle," said Marta loudly. "I've brought the lad home, haven't I? Well, be thankful for that, and stop insulting me."

"But where has he *been*?" sobbed Mrs. Castle. "What's the meaning of it? Every one in the road knows about him being missing, and I know what they're thinking. They'll be saying now, behind my back, that I'm a cruel mother. What else could any one think when your boy runs away? Oh I haven't, I haven't deserved it! The police are out looking for him, it's—it's dreadful, they were even—even talking of dragging the river. John, put on your clothes and run tell Mr Bramshaw that Luke's come home."

(Mr. Bramshaw was a policeman who lived in North Street.)

John looked at his mother beseechingly. "Now, Mam?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, now at *once*," urged Mrs. Castle plaintively. "Say Luke had been—been to see some friends—some quite nice people. Ask him not to let it get in the papers, say—say I troubled him unnecessarily, say it's *quite* all right."

John went obediently and at once, though he was, of course, longing to stay and hear what Luke had been up to. Longing to listen, too, to what Marta had to say. For though he understood that she was a disgraceful old woman who shamed her relations, still, he couldn't help being curious.

He ran all the way to Mr. Bramshaw's house and all the way back, but, by the time he got home again, he realized that he had missed much, the story was told and the situation had worked itself up into a climax. Mrs. Castle was sobbing hysterically, with her head on the table, and Marta was shouting abuse of Lilian Castle and defence of Luke and herself, and using such amazing language that young John's mind was torn with indecision between a proper impulse to put his fingers in his ears, and an improper desire to hear more and yet more. The result of this indecision was that he leaped to his mother's side, raised her head, flung his arms about her, clasped her to his bosom, and faced his great-aunt with pale face and twitching lips, whilst his grey eyes, usually rather colourless, darkened and flashed with anger.

"You *dare* to speak to my Mam like that," he cried valiantly. "You dare! If—if you were a man I'd fight you!"

"Oh John, oh John!" whimpered Mrs. Castle, hiding her tear-swollen face against his bravely throbbing heart.

"Never mind, Mam, never mind what she says!" cried John. His eyes blazed against Marta. "You leave the house instantly, do you hear, leave the house, leave the house, leave the house!" His childish voice was high and hysterical with excitement.

"All right, old lad," said Marta. "Keep your wool on—I'll go. And I'm glad to see you've got a bit of spunk in you, after all. Thank you for feeding the chicks, that is if you did feed 'em, which I hope to God you may have. Good-night each. See you soon, Luke."

She marched away, shutting the front door firmly behind her. Mrs. Castle clung to John and went on sobbing, but only for a few seconds. Then Luke created a diversion, and restored his mother to her presence of mind, by sliding to the floor in a dead faint. One moment, so it seemed to him, he had run after Marta, with some idea of getting back to the circus, and the next moment he was lying on the horse-hair sofa, spluttering over a doze of sal volatile, and John was saying, "Did I ought to go for the doctor, Mam?" It was all extraordinary.

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## V I I

LUKE was not what his brother John described as a "board school kid," he went (as John had done before he won his scholarship) to the church school, and Mrs. Castle paid a penny or two a week for him to go there. She wanted so much, poor soul, to bring up her boys to be "gentlemen," and she felt that the church school was just a little bit less common than the board school, though the same class of children went there, and the masters were, if anything, more bigoted, and the teaching not so good. "But they have the advantage of religion there," as Mrs. Castle explained to her neighbour, Mrs. Hunt, "and religion is a great thing."

Mrs. Hunt agreed heartily; she sent her little daughter, Elsie, to the church school, though her motive was a different one, being purely commercial. The Hunts' bakery had a good connection among church people, therefore Elsie must attend the church school.

Elsie was a year older than Luke. She was a dainty little creature, with long fair curls that shone like floss silk in the sun. She wore these curls, in a distinctly daring and original style for those days, tied at the neck with two big bows of ribbon, and, at every springing step she took, the curls danced up and down, flaunting their beauty to the world. Her eyes were very big and blue, her complexion was very pink and white, she was extremely pretty and she knew it; she held her head high and almost pirouetted as she walked. Her mother and father thought there wasn't another little girl like her in the world, they let her have her own way in everything. Elsie liked pretty clothes and cheap jewellery, she was given pretty clothes (which Luke's mother made for her), and she went to school, in summer time, in dainty print frocks, a big hat with a lacy straw brim and a wreath of roses round the crown, and one or two silver bangles jingling on her wrist.

It was this apparition, clothed in pink, with the fair curls dancing under the lacy hat, that Luke saw frisking up the street in front of him one morning as he stamped moodily to school.

Elsie! Luke slowed his steps. He was not sure that he wanted to catch up with her. He and Elsie often walked to school together, and he admired her, for two reasons. First, because her dad owned a pony, which he was allowed to help harness into the delivery van, and sometimes even to ride on Saturday afternoons. Secondly, because Elsie could dance, and not ordinary polkas and waltzes, either, but skirt dances, Spanish dances, clog dances. She had special lessons from a special teacher in Whitfield, and she performed at charity concerts, and also at end of term "displays."

This kind of dancing, of course, was not "circus," but it was nearer to it than anything else in Luke's daily life, it lifted Elsie out of the rut in which the other children of his acquaintance blindly grovelled. The little girl was, in her way, an artist, not that Luke put it to himself like that, he only knew that she was different, not quite a "flatty," and if not "circus," yet the next best thing to it. So Luke was in the habit of preening himself, somewhat, in Elsie's presence; she excited him, made him want to show off, do daring things, prove himself different too, and better than the other boys.

But to-day Luke was not in the mood for preening himself. His spirits were at zero and his thoughts were bitter. For a week both his mam and John had been "on" at him about the Beckett fiasco. His mam said, "How could you *bring* yourself to hurt me so?" John said, "Hoo! Little idiot, running away like that and having to be brought back! I should think you *do* feel small!" Luke did feel small, but it didn't help matters to have John remind him of it, nor to have his mam's tired voice continually reproaching him; nor to have the boys at school calling, "Circus softy, circus sausage!" after him, and the girls whispering and giggling. Nor did it exactly lessen Luke's bitterness that Elsie, heartlessly falling in with the general attitude, should have avoided him for the whole week, forgetting, it seemed, that she and Luke were in the habit of calling each other "cul," which was circus for chum, and something very special and private between them.

So Luke slowed his walk and hoped that Elsie would frisk on her way, without seeing him. But, near the top of the street, Elsie stopped. One of the buttons of her black, ankle strap

shoes was undone. She bent down to do it up, pulled the stiff strap impatiently, and—hey presto!—the button flew off, rolled down the pavement behind her, and into the gutter. Elsie jumped after the button, picked it up and, looking along the street, saw Luke.

Should she, shouldn't she? Yes, she would. After all, he was one of her "lads," the only one in sight at the moment. She stood with her feet together, rising up and down on her toes, smiling.

Luke came up, slowly.

"Hullo, Luke!"

"'Lo, Else."

"Me bootton's come off!" She held out a white palm with the little black button nestling in it. Every action she made was pretty, as if part of a dance. Her eyes kindled brilliantly, always the consciousness of a "lad's" admiration made her bubble up inside with mischievous merriment. "Me bootton, look!"

Luke wouldn't look. Head up, eyes distant, mouth pouched into a soundless whistle, he was entirely self-sufficient, it seemed. But, bless us, in Elsie's presence, no lad was allowed to wear that indifferent, lord-of-creation manner for long. And this morning, particularly, she had the advantage of Luke, because he was secretly yearning for consolation. A few smiles, a little coaxing, a touch or two of flattery, and they were 'culs' again, and in the sunny atmosphere of her blandishments Luke's spirits rose surprisingly. Elsie was funny. Girls were funny. Who could have been funnier than little Anna—first putting out her tongue at him, then taking no notice of him, and then—Hand in pocket, Luke's finger and thumb closed over a silver fourpenny bit. Somewhere inside his breast a cock began to crow. He was boasting to Elsie now about something mysterious called the flipflaps, which one day he would show her how to perform. His thoughts were bitter no longer. . . .

At school, after the opening hymn and prayer, came catechism, and then Scripture. Luke, though he had an instinctively religious nature and an intense belief in God, found Scripture as boring as any other lesson. He seldom listened to what was being taught, he dreamed his own dreams, thought his own thoughts,

and endured the enforced sitting still, and the nervous unrest it brought to his limbs, with what philosophy he could muster.

The younger boys and girls had their Scripture lesson together. To-day the mistress had a bad cold. To rest her voice she set the children reading the first chapter of Genesis. Her loud sneezes and trumpet-like blowings formed an intermittent accompaniment to the children's sing-song mangling of the text, and brightened the monotony for most of them.

When the reading was finished:

"Boys and girls obed your coby books. A-tish-oo! Are you all listedig? Dague your peds and coby out the first five verses of the chabder you have just been readig. Dague your tibe, write deatly, and rebember dough blods."

The teacher sat down and muffled her swollen nose in a large wet handkerchief. How her eyes smarted! Perhaps it was hay fever, she thought drearily, and if so it would go on for weeks—it always did.

"Quiedly, quiedly!" She rapped the desk with a ruler. The commotion the children made was rattling through her aching head. Her head felt like an egg-shell that was having pebbles thrown at it. A boy dropped a pencil box on the floor—she wanted to scream. That was better, only the scratching of pens now, and the heavy breathing. But how badly they sat, backs hunched, elbows sprawled, heads nearly touching the paper! Some even had their tongues lolling out! She ought to correct them, but she hadn't the energy. There was a boy with a bald patch on the top of his head, she could see it, distinctly, as he bowed over his book; that was ringworm, he oughtn't to be at school. And a little girl was digging at her thick black hair with the end of her pen; oh dear, oh dear, lice most certainly, and the lice would be dropping on to the copy-book. The teacher wriggled uncomfortably, her own head seemed to be itching all over. She wished she was married, with a home of her own, and children with rosy faces and clean heads.

"Lugue Casdle!"

"Yusmiss."

"Why aren't you writig? Bague haste. Begid."

"Yusmiss."

Luke, pen in hand, turned his eyes from unseeingly regard-



ing the boy in front of him, and slowly read over the first lines he had to write. *In the beginning*, he wrote very carefully. Then paused and thought about the words.

What happened in the beginning? God *created*. That meant made something out of nothing. Out of his head. How grand to create! Lucio Castelli had created a circus. That was the beginning, seeing it in your head, then you set out. You had, at first, only a very small tent, a couple of ponies, three or four dogs, some little gates for the ponies to jump over, and hoops and a see-saw for the dogs. Luke, holding the pen a fraction of an inch from the paper, in a pretence of writing, drew hoops and little gates in the air. You travelled on, you saved up every penny, you bought some more ponies, then some monkeys, perhaps even a lion—Luke's pen was travelling now up and down the roads of England—more than one lion——

"Lugue Casdle!"

"Yusmiss."

The teacher stood tiptoe on tired feet. She peered from inflamed eyes over the bowed heads of the other boys at Luke. "Why aren't you writing?"

"I am, Miss."

*In the beginning*. He had written all that. What came next? *In the beginning God created* . . . But other people created also, and when they created they became God. *In the beginning God created a circus*. No, Lucio Castelli created the circus. *In the beginning Lucio Castelli created a circus*. How grand that sentence would look written down! Suppose he did write it? Would it be very bad of him? No, not really bad, because it was true. But, all the same, it would be what teacher called "Taking-the-name-of-the-Lord-thy-God-in-vain." He might write it—quickly—just to see how it looked, then scratch it out with a lot of thick, inky scabble. . . . He *must* write it. He *would* write it. Bad be begged!

Luke stooped over his open copy-book and, shielding the page protectively with his left arm, wrote:

*In the beginning Lucio Castelli created a circus.*

There! It was done. The glorious, glorious words were written. He might make a whole book beginning with those words, a book much more important than the Bible. What would

he put next in his book? Oh yes, of course, about the two ponies and the dogs and the little gates and hoops.

"Lugue Casdle!" Again the snuffling voice breaking in upon his dreams.

"Yusmiss."

"Brig your coby-book to me."

Instantly Luke took the ink well and tipped it over what he had written. The ink ran all down the page and over all his fingers, but the tell-tale words showed through.

"Ad once! Ad once!"

Should he tear out the ink-stained page and crumple it up? No. Who cares? Let her see it! The recklessness of despair took hold of Luke. When he laid the open copy-book on the desk, he was smiling, and he looked impudent.

Well, now there was threepence to pay for a new book, but fortunately he had the shilling that Gran'an had given him, so that his mam needn't be brought into it. Teacher also "told on him" to Mr. Kirk, the headmaster, but that was nothing new. Luke had often suffered at the hands of Mr. Kirk. Yet when, later in the day, he stood in the presence of this stout, square-jawed individual, Luke had one moment of real panic. The panic was at the thought of the end of the term drill display, for which he, in company with nineteen other boys, was already practising. Instructed by Mr. Kirk, who had in his youth attended a gymnasium, and who possessed in some ways ideas ahead of his time, these boys were learning simple balances and tumbling tricks with which to astonish their assembled parents at the annual gathering held at the end of the summer term. Luke was the youngest of those selected, yet he was the leader of them. This was something he really could do. What the other boys found difficult, he found easy, and yet what he found easy he practised to make perfect, at night, in his own back-garden.

Suppose now, Mr. Kirk, as, in his business-like manner, he stepped to the cupboard where the cane was kept, were to swing round suddenly and say, "You don't take part in no drill display after this!" In that case Luke felt he would do something desperate, he might even go and hang himself like the old man in North Street who was turned out of his house because he couldn't pay the rent. No, but of course Luke couldn't hang

himself, or he would never have his circus; but something desperate he would do, for the drill practice was the only happening to which he looked forward at school.

Whilst Luke took down his trousers he prayed fiercely, not that the Lord might soften the blows so soon to fall upon his tender posterior. Luke, as he often proudly told himself, was "tough," and he could "take the cane all right." He prayed that the Lord might cause Mr. Kirk not to think of the drill display; he even threatened, in a desperation that scorns all logic, to give up believing in the Deity, if the Deity did not grant this request. Apparently the Deity did grant it, or it may be that Mr. Kirk politically overlooked such a method of punishing the small boy who, in this matter—if in no other—was a credit to the school. At any rate the drill display was not mentioned and, in the afternoon, Luke with a sore behind but a joyous heart, found himself as usual leading his nineteen schoolfellows through their tumbling tricks on the lawn in Mr. Kirk's garden. And when the practice was over, master and pupil parted in genial mood, with the affair of the caning forgotten by the one and forgiven by the other.

Outside the schoolhouse Luke found Elsie waiting for him. Her eyes were alight with eagerness and her lips were smiling and friendly.

"See me dirty hands," she began, holding them out to Luke. "I climbed on the wall to watch you lads drill. Didn't you see me? 'Course you did, only you was feeling too cocky to let on. My! You were champion!" Under the lacy hat she glanced sideways at Luke: flattery first, then the question she had been bursting all day to ask him. "What did you write in your copy-book, Luke?"

"Nothing much."

"Something rude?" asked Elsie hopefully.

"'Course not."

"You might of. What then? Come on, tell us, cul!"

At that magic word Luke's reserve melted. "Can you keep a secret, Elsie?"

Couldn't she just! Trust her! Might she drop dead if she split! Elsie hopped in her excitement. She loved secrets.

"Well then," Luke drew a deep breath. "When I grow up I'm going to have a circus."

That all? Elsie was disappointed. She didn't call that much of a secret. "But what did you write to make teacher mad?"

"Well, you see——" Luke tried to explain. "I was thinking of my circus, and I was feeling grand, an'— an'——"

"And *what?*" cried Elsie.

Luke told her.

"O-oh, Luke!" Elsie felt rather scandalized. "Didn't you think as God might blast you?"

"No," answered Luke, his heart swelling. "He won't. He knows. He *wants* me to do it."

"My!" murmured Elsie, and they walked on in silence. He with his dreams, she turning over in her mind his last proud statement, half-envious of that pride, half-admiring.

"Well—I'm going to be a dancer," she said at last, defiantly.

"Yes," said Luke, without interest.

"A dancer's a grand thing to be," went on Elsie boastfully. "Every one looks at you, every one says, 'ain't she pretty, ain't she clever?' Me moomther says there won't be any one like me, with me curls and me beauty. She says I'll turn the men's heads when I grow up. I shall, an' all. I could turn 'em now, if I wanted to. You ain't listening, Luke!"

Luke sighed. He was gazing straight ahead, far, far ahead. He was not a little boy walking home from school, but a man with the burden of creation upon him. Elsie took hold of his arm and shook it indignantly. "You did ought to listen when I'm telling you things!"

"I am listening, Else."

"Look at me then!"

"What for?" asked Luke.

"Because I'm so pretty. Say Luke—shall I dance in your circus for you?"

An image of a curly-headed Cossack who danced on a piebald horse flashed through Luke's mind. "Hi! Hi! Hi!" The Cossack yelled and the bells on the horse's collar jangled wildly. "On a pony?" he said eagerly. "Could you, do you think—dance on a pony?"

*Could* she dance on a pony! "Could dance on an elephant, could dance on broken bottles. *Anything* I could dance on!"

She had Luke's attention now, he was looking at her, and the excitement in his eyes gave her a sense of exultation. He was now one of her "lads" again, but when he stared away from her with that blind-owl expression on his face she had wanted to slap him. "There isn't no one could dance on a pony so easy as I could," she assured him.

"Then I'll marry you," said Luke firmly, "and it'll be *our* circus."

"O-oh, Luke, is that a promise? Shall I be the circus queen, an' all? Shall I wear roses in me hair?"

"Yes," said Luke.

"Or a silver star, like a fairy? That 'ud look nice, wouldn't it, Luke?"

"Yes, a star like a fairy, and a silver dress like"—"Like Anna wore," he had been going to say, but some inexplicable reserve prevented him. "Like dew," he said vaguely. "You know, dew with the sun on it."

Now he could see Elsie, resplendent and sparkling, careering under the lights of his circus. Her shining curls danced wildly in time to her dancing feet; but it was not a star that flickered amongst those shining curls, it was a burning flame . . .

"And me feet shod in satin," said Elsie enthusiastically. "I'll be a draw right enough. Say Luke—we are engaged, aren't we?"

"Of course—I said so."

"But you ain't excited about it, Luke! How can we be properly engaged if you ain't excited?" Despite the thrilling prospect suddenly opened to her, Elsie felt dissatisfied. The romance fell flat. "Of course," she said importantly, with a quick, sidelong glance at her prospective husband, "me moother won't like it. *She* thinks I ought to marry a duke."

"Dukes ain't nothing," answered Luke.

"Yes, they are, they wear crowns on their heads when they go to parties, and they give you jewels and furs and ask the Queen to tea. I wouldn't mind marrying a duke. Perhaps I shall, after all."

"Then I'm through with you," said Luke, and he spat on

the pavement and ran away from her down Camershaw Road, rage and bitter scorn making his heart feel too big for his trembling body.

She was a Flatty, with a big 'f', that's what Elsie was. She had narrer thoughts, like his gran'an said, she wasn't worthy the high honour he had paid her, she wasn't worth tuppence. *She* dance in his circus? Not likely! She shouldn't so much as take a peep at it, not if she came to the pay-box with her duke on her arm and a crown on her head. Flatty, Flatty, Flatty—he loathed and despised her.

That evening, Luke asked his mam for an empty cocoa tin. She, of course, must know what he wanted it for, and he told her to put wild flowers in, for the botany class. "We have to find different kinds," he said, "and there's a prize for the one as finds the most."

Mrs. Castle, pleased to think that Luke was at last showing interest in something scholastic, washed out a tin for him and dried it in the oven. Then Luke carried it away to his bedroom and fastened down the lid securely with a strip of sticking plaster, which he had previously filched from the little medicine cupboard that hung over his mam's bed. He suffered no qualm of conscience, either in lying to his mam, or in stealing her plaster. Such deceptions were part and parcel of the life he led. If he was not permitted to do what he must, openly, then he must do it in secret. Neither his mam, nor any one else, should prevent him from working out his own salvation.

With the kitchen scissors he gouged a slit in the lid of his tin. Then he set the tin on his chest of drawers, and stood awhile to brood over his handiwork. "Lucio Castelli's circus," he said under his breath. He put his hand into the pocket of his shabby little trousers and, coin by coin, brought out nine pennies and dropped them into his home-made money-box. That was the beginning: nine pennies in a sealed up cocoa tin, and the end was—what? With his mind filled with visions of elephants, lions, piebald horses, glittering acrobats and red-nosed clowns, Luke tiptoed down to the back garden and hid his treasure behind a loose brick in the garden wall.

## VIII

ELSIE being the elder by a year, left school before Luke. Occasionally she helped in her parents' shop, handing out buns and loaves of bread as if they were favours bestowed by a prima ballerina, and flirting, in a childish yet subtle manner of her own, with any of the customers who happened to be personable males. But she regarded this serving in the shop as merely a passing incident in her career. She was training to become a professional dancer, and her lessons in Madame Trown's academy occupied most of her time. Conscious of her ability and basking in the never-failing adulation of her parents, she became very self-important and, occasionally, quite condescending in her attitude to Luke.

She and Luke were "engaged" again. It had taken Luke a long time to forgive that indiscreet statement of Elsie's about marrying a duke, but he had forgiven it, because, if he was going to have a circus, he must marry somebody. All circus bosses were married, so he believed, and had big families. And once having picked on Elsie and confided in her, it was not possible for Luke, however much at times she might annoy him, to regard her any more as a mere outsider. You didn't go round blabbing your secrets to every one, nor did you fix your mind on a wife and then change your mind; not easily, not if you were Luke Castle.

But Elsie wasn't sure, after all, if Luke's mythical circus ring was the place for which she was destined. A season in a big London theatre, with every male in the audience crazy about her, followed by a meteor-like triumph across Europe, with marquises, counts and princes waiting in a queue for her seductive emergence from the stage door, now held her secret fancy. But she said nothing about this to Luke, though often she was tempted to; his quiet assumption of her destiny as part of his own scheme was so constant and so unshakable, that it somehow defeated her instinct to "tell him off," even while it profoundly irritated her.

But, "He don't own me," she would think, tossing her shining curls, that now hung below her slender waist and were

the envy of all the girls and the admiration of all the lads of her acquaintance. "I'm not his horse nor yet his dog, and so he'll find out."

"All right old lad," she would say to herself when Luke, as they walked together by the muddy waters of the Endcliffe river, began to talk softly and passionately of Castelli's Circus, and of the unswerving devotion with which they must both labour to translate that passionate dream into reality, "all right old lad, but maybe it won't work out just as you think. In a few years I'll be way up at the top of another ladder. I don't look to be held back by you, nor nobody else."

Instinctively she felt that Luke should not own her, yet, paradoxically, she liked his assumption of ownership; it thrilled her to be his secret sweetheart—was he not, after all, different from any other lad she knew? She would not for the world forgo the flattery of his single-minded, if somewhat high-handed, selection of herself.

One autumn evening, when Luke arrived at their trysting place—the stile that led to the river meadows—he found Elsie waiting for him in a state of great excitement. Usually he arrived first and had to wait for her, she liked the importance of keeping him waiting, though his philosophic acceptance of this trait in her character rather took the edge off the proceedings. To-night, however, there she was, hopping on and off the stile in her eagerness, her eyes shining like the first stars of evening.

"Eh Luke, guess what," she began at once. "I'm to dance in the panto this Christmas, solo and all! I'm to be The Little Princess of the Foam. I'm to step out of a pink clam shell, you know—it's going to open and there'll be me smiling inside, and me ballet skirt's going to have sea bubbles on it. Don't you wish you'd left school?"

"I am leaving—very soon," answered Luke. "I'll be pantomime cat, not this year, but sometime, see if I aren't. And with the money I earn I'll buy a troupe of dogs. Say Else, what about your wages?"

"Well, what about them?"

Elsie sprang over the stile, followed by Luke. She took the steps in one, two, three jumps and landed on her toes; he put his hands on the rails and vaulted over. They turned to saunter



along the path by the river. "I can do a stand-jump over a table now," Luke said proudly. "I'll show you to-morrow. But them wages, Else, you'll not spend them, will you?"

"Spend them? 'Course I'll spend them. I shall buy some new clothes—silk ones. And a necklace with green stones."

Luke thought of the cocoa tin, hidden behind the loose brick in the garden wall. He had nearly a pound in it now, earned chiefly by going errands for people. "You ought to put the money by—for Castelli's," he said slowly.

What a silly idea! Really, what next would he say? Was he to claim her money, then, as well as herself?

"Me moother says I'm to buy new clothes," she announced firmly.

Luke didn't answer, he walked at her side, gazing at the oily, slow-moving river, and pondering. That she should regard new clothes as more important than Castelli's vexed him sorely. Elsie felt uneasy at his silence. Then she thought of a flattering explanation of it. "You're jealous!" she crowed.

"Jealous?" Luke glanced at her in perplexity. "What of?"

"Me dancing in panto."

"No," answered Luke quietly, "I'm not."

But he was, he was, he was! Elsie would have it so. She kept on telling him he was jealous until he got angry with her, and then she was quite sure he was.

They parted, somewhat stiffly for an engaged couple, an hour later.

When Luke got home his mother said wearily. "Another letter from Mr. Kirk! He says you weren't at school yesterday. Again Luke, you've been playing truant *again*! Oh Luke, you break my heart!"

Luke said nothing. It seemed to Lilian Castle that he regarded her distress with the most callous indifference. She swallowed once or twice, drew a thin hand over her eyes and asked weakly, "Where were you this time?"

"At Rothersley horse show."

"But—I forbade you—why will you—don't you *want* to grow up a good man, Luke?"

"No," said Luke, and bolted out of the room.

No, no, a thousand times no, not a good man, not her kind of good man, or John's kind. Only the kind of good man who balanced on wires, who twirled on rings, who somersaulted off and on galloping horses, who calmly walked among lions, who quietly lay down among tigers, who playfully wrestled with bears, who was utterly brave and utterly fearless, utterly strong and utterly self-assured; who daily took his life in his hands and daily triumphed, whilst the flatties, who did not understand what he was doing, applauded stupidly, though it was not for their applause he risked his life, making his talents perfect, it was for himself, because he must, because he was like God——

Left sitting amid a strew of needles, pins, cottons and pieces of fabric, with Mr. Kirk's note clenched in her hand, Lilian Castle felt like screaming. What was she to do? What *was* she to do? Over and over again she had forbidden Luke to frequent horse shows, fairs or circuses, or to loaf about talking to rough men, grooms, jockeys, gipsies, and vagrants. Calmly, without any show of sulks or temper, but resolutely and as if his doing so was inevitable, he defied her. Let her weep, let her pray, let her spiritually go down on her knees and implore him, for her sake, for John's sake, for the sake of their reputation, to give up his low associates and behave as a little gentleman should, it made no difference. He learned nothing at school. He was untidy, disobedient, lazy (or if not exactly lazy, then hopelessly dreamy) and dirty. His thick fair hair was always unbrushed, his nails black, his clothes a disgrace. When she expostulated with him he answered scarcely a word, but his lips would pout and his strange blue eyes kindle and turn dark with thoughts that she could not fathom. It exasperated her that she could not fathom his thoughts; at times she wanted to seize him and shake him, *force* him to be different, more like herself, more normal and understandable.

At other times she really tried hard to be sympathetic and conciliatory—as over the matter of the monkey, for instance. For weeks Luke had pestered her to let him have a monkey, but how could she? What a thing to ask! A monkey at 19 Camer-shaw Road, tearing up her sewing, stealing her cotton reels, perhaps even scratching and biting her patrons when they came to be fitted! But, since Luke seemed to love animals so much,

she tried to meet him half-way; she went out and purchased two handsome Dutch rabbits, a buck and a doe, complete with hutch. She planned it as a surprise for Luke, and, when he came home from school, she told him that since it was impossible for them to keep a monkey, she hoped he would be pleased with what she had bought him.

But Luke only looked at her—with such a balked and clouded expression, not like a boy at all, but like a grown and disillusioned man—and said: “Nothing can be done with rabbits.” And next day he carried off the rabbits, hutch and all, and gave them away to a boy at school—*gave* them away, as if they were worth nothing, though she had spent much more than she could afford in buying them for him. And she scolded and talked, scolded and talked, and tried to get him to explain why he had behaved so. And all she got out of him was the same nonsensical statement, “Nothing can be done with rabbits.”

Really poor Mrs. Castle sometimes began to wonder whether her youngest son was “quite right.” At night, when she had folded her work, she would drag herself upstairs to bed and lie awake, aching with tiredness and wondering what was going to happen about Luke, until she herself felt half-demented. She lay praying for sleep that would not come, her wide-open eyes that burned with heat, transforming the blessed darkness to a whirligig of red lights and yellow streaks and flashes. Until, at last, the thought of her elder son, John, brought a measure of comfort. And desperately holding on to that thought, clinging to the image of John as a shipwrecked sailor clings to a plank, or a martyr surrounded by flames to the vision of God, she would sink into exhausted sleep. Yes, John was her only comfort.

John understood her and sympathised with her, he was considerate and thoughtful. He would pick flowers to bring home to her, he eased her household work by carrying the coal, by cleaning the steps, by washing up the dishes in the evening; all these things he did for her, eagerly, gladly, naturally, though he was studying so hard himself, poring over his books till midnight or after, determined to get on in life. Yes, John had “grit” like herself. He had passed his matriculation and had won a scholarship to Whitfield College, where he was working for his B.A. Mrs. Castle adored him, he was all that she could

wish a son of hers to be. And yet, it must be confessed that, at eighteen years old, John was something of a young prig. Pale, slender, good-looking in a way, with large grey eyes, regular features, a repressed expression and a self-conscious walk, young John, without question, took upon his unmuscular shoulders the burden and responsibility of the position he found himself in, as elder son of a poor and hard-working and generally ill-used widow woman. The tired lines and worried wrinkles in his mother's white face touched him to the quick; but, thank God, it was not he who had set them there, it was Luke. John looked upon his scapegrace younger brother with extreme disapproval.

"It's all very fine," he said to Luke one day, "but if you go on as you do, who's to look after Mam in her old age? I shall do my part, of course, but you ought to help."

"I shall help her," Luke thought. "When I have my circus—Lucio Castelli's Circus—I will give her all the money she needs." But he did not tell John about Lucio Castelli's Circus.

"See what Mam's done for us," John went on, "see how she slaves and works herself to skin and bone! How can you be so ungrateful?"

Luke didn't answer. John turned to his books, thinking how bad and sullen his brother was, not understanding the cause of Luke's silence, or how his conscience smote him, despite the deep feeling in his soul that he must go his own way, mam or no mam.

"He's a rotter," John thought disgustedly. Very well, it was up to him, John, alone, to look after their Mam in her old age. The thought spurred him on to greater ambition and greater self-congratulation, and he resolved by hard work and honourable behaviour to make up to Mrs. Castle for the shortcomings of his younger brother.

Soon after this Luke left school. He had not reached the top standard and he was bottom of his class. It was disgraceful, Lilian Castle felt, but what was the use of keeping him there any longer? He was "gone fourteen" and he evidently did not intend to learn anything useful.

"We must find some sort of a job for you," she said in a pained voice.

Luke wished for a job in Mr. Whale's stables, grooming the horses, but Mrs. Castle wouldn't hear of it. Such work was not "genteel," it led nowhere, it would keep Luke in low company, among swearing ostlers and loafing stable boys. He was rough enough already, he would become, if that were possible, rougher. Also there was old Marta living in the yard, a corrupting influence. But *some* job must be found for Luke, and it seemed to his harassed mother that he was fit for nothing.

She confided her anxiety to Mrs. Hunt at the bakery.

Mrs. Hunt thoughtfully smoothed up her back-hair with a small plump hand. The hair was like Elsie's, fair and shining, only there were a few grey streaks in it. It was arranged over her forehead in a thick roll, and behind the roll was a bun, with a tortoise-shell comb sticking out at each side. The combs were set with brilliants, which Mrs. Castle did not feel to be quite in good taste. Because of these brilliants, Mrs. Castle understood that she was Mrs. Hunt's superior. But then, a widow woman with a problem must confide in someone, and Mrs. Hunt meant well, poor soul. So Mrs. Castle said:

"I really don't know what to do about our Luke. I can't keep him home eating the bread of idleness, now can I? I'd willingly stint myself and put him to a trade. I'd thought of plumbing, that's refined sort of work, or house painting. But Luke says he won't. He pouts his lips—you know the way he looks—and says 'You'd be spending money for nowt'—nothing. So what can I do?"

"What say he comes to us then?" asked Mrs. Hunt. "We could do with a boy. Alfred sacked the last only t'other day, caught him with his hand in the till—what's the world coming to, do you know? Alfred can't be in the bakehouse and on the rounds both, not easily he can't. So Luke could do the rounds."

"It's very good of you," murmured Mrs. Castle.

"Not at all," answered Mrs. Hunt, "we could do with him. He'll have to look smarter than he does now though—oh I know it's not your fault, but we can't have rags and tatters calling on customers, now can we? Let him put on his best and come round to-morrow, eight o'clock sharp. That's settled then. I'll tell Alfred."

"It's very good of you," murmured Mrs. Castle again, "I'll see if Luke——"

"He'll come fast enough," said Mrs. Hunt cheerfully. "He's mashed on our Elsie. Mashed like the rest of them," she added with a fat smirk of parental pride.

Oh dear, what a vulgar word! thought Mrs. Castle. And what right had a boy of fourteen to be "mashed" on any one? He ought to be thinking of his duty to his mother and of getting on in life, like John. As she took leave of her neighbour, Mrs. Castle was conscious of a vague resentment, which she concealed under ladylike expressions of gratitude. She *was* grateful, of course, it was very good of Mrs. Hunt to offer Luke a job, but the profession of errand boy to a baker was not what Mrs. Castle had imagined for any son of hers.

Somewhat to her surprise Luke accepted the job at once. Remembering Mrs. Hunt's words about his being "mashed" on Elsie, Mrs. Castle said bitterly, "You'll not be able to hang round the shop, mind; you'll be out delivering all day."

But Luke was not thinking of Elsie; it didn't occur to him that he had any more need for her company than an occasional evening walk afforded him. She was just part of his future, a part he had settled to his own satisfaction. No, Luke was thinking of the Hunts' pony, of feeding it, grooming it, harnessing it, driving it. It was a pony of intelligence, he felt; not much to look at, perhaps, though it would look better after he had groomed it a time or two. But of its intelligence he had proof, already it would come right across the Camershaw fields and put its head over the fence in response to his whistle. Now, in his spare time he would train it, turn it into a proper circus pony. All he wanted was an unlimited supply of sugar, which must be thieved if his mam took all his wages, and a whip—a hazel switch would do—not to strike the pony with, but to make signs with, little secret movements of the whip that no one but himself and his pupil would be aware of. A particular movement for each trick: "giving the pony the office" old Marta would call it.

Thrilled with a sense of approaching bliss that had nothing to do with getting his first job, or with becoming Elsie Hunt's father's errand boy, Luke went out into the Camershaw fields to select a

suitable switch from the hazel thicket. The autumn sun was low over the fields, wind buffeted the grass blades and lifted Luke's tangled forelock. As he drew near the thicket he began to run, possessed with a sense of urgency and joy. Pushing his way into the very centre of the hazel bushes, he selected a straight, slim branch, and, having cut it off cleanly with his penknife and stripped it of leaves, stood thoughtfully stroking its smooth contours with his left hand.

Shafts of sunlight glanced and flickered about him, lengthening and shortening as the wind shifted the interstices of the close-growing branches. The withering leaves stirred above and around him with a persistent dry whispering, a continually moving, yet never removed, canopy of sound. Beyond the thicket and across the fields, from all sides, came the low rumour of a thousand noises, the blended hubbub of the life of Whitfield. Yet it seemed to Luke that he was standing at the nadir of an immense quiet; alone with his dreams, alone with the Something for which he existed. A Something that was neither tangible, nor audible, nor visible, but more solid, more real than any object of sense; a world waiting its material shape, but not without form and void, a world already perfect in the imagination, whence, from the beginning to the end of time, all worlds proceed. Here he stood, a fourteen year old boy, one who in the eyes of his fellows was merely a misfit, a failure, a good-for-nothing, to his mother a cause for despair, to his brother a "rotter." Yet in his hand was the symbol of the creator, and within him and surrounding him, streaming through his thoughts, arching his brain and passing beyond his brain into the thought-charged atmosphere that surrounded him, was the spirit shape of the world he would create.

"It's begun," he said under his breath, and crept softly out of the thicket, steeped through and through with a sense of glory and power which, though it withdrew from him little by little with every stride he took towards home, yet left a memory that no after difficulties, no despairs, setbacks or coming humiliations could ever quite efface.

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## I X

THE Hunts' pony, Bootblack, was saddled-backed, rusty-coated and middle-aged. When Luke took charge of it, one chilly November morning, its coat was already thickening against the cold, and fretted flat on croup and sides by the constant rubbing of harness. Certainly no beauty to the outward eye was tubby-bellied little Bootblack; but for Luke it was the stuff out of which circuses are made, and he loved that pony with a passion that would have astonished his pasty-faced employer and, indeed, would have been understood by no one of his acquaintance but his great-aunt Marta.

It was Marta who suggested the secret name, Promise-of-the-Ring, by which Luke re-christened his charge; it was Marta to whom he confided the progress in Promise's training, Marta who initiated him into the words and actions and subtle persuasions by which such training must be carried on, Marta who exhorted him to patience and extreme gentleness when, with tears in his eyes, Luke came to her confessing his frequent failures.

Before dawn, after dark, in the stable, out in the fields, even on a country round, unharnessing the pony in some roadside quarry or secluded lane, Luke worked at his training of Promise. In six months he had succeeded in teaching Promise to shake and nod his head, to count, to untie a handkerchief from round his foreleg, to walk backwards, and sometimes, but not often, for Promise was heavy-bodied and weak in the hind quarters, to rear at the command "Allez oop!" Also the patient animal consented to trot round in a circle whilst Luke performed a few simple tricks on its back.

"Don't you go wearing that pony to skin and bone, now," said Marta, as she handed Luke the supply of lump sugar which was her contribution to Promise's training.

"I'm not, truly I'm not," answered Luke. And, indeed, never was animal more considered by any human being than that pottle-bellied little creature by Luke. On the rounds Luke walked every hill, and sometimes, if the street was an extra



steep one, he would loop the reins over a gatepost at the bottom and himself set off with a basket on each arm, leaving Promise to doze placidly till his return. What with the sugar, the extra rests, and Luke's careful grooming, Promise had never looked so well. Luke, anxious to keep his job, became careful over his own appearance, he took to oiling his fair hair and cleaning his nails. Mrs. Hunt told Mrs. Castle that the lad was "getting on champion." John and his mother rejoiced together over the young scapegrace's unexpected reformation.

"It's like a miracle, John," Lilian Castle said, one afternoon, when they were taking a cosy tea together by the kitchen fire. "Tell you what I'll do, I'll pay for him to join that gym class he's always pestering about. I'll show him he doesn't lose anything by being a good boy."

So, when Luke came home he was told that he might go to the municipal gymnasium on three evenings a week. His mother didn't understand in the least what it meant to him, but she saw the amazed delight that widened his eyes, and the unusual twitchings of emotion that disturbed the corners of his full, pouting lips. Luke wanted to shout, he wanted to sing, he wanted to laugh, he wanted to cry, he wanted to go upstairs and bury his head in his pillow and fling his heels in the air. Suppressing all these peculiar desires, he managed to say quietly, "I'm—I'm glad. I'll—I'll work hard, Mam."

Altogether Luke's world was rosy. Old Dough-Boy (as Marta called Mr. Hunt) raised Luke's wages by a shilling a week, a fact which he felt no qualms over concealing from his mother. The shillings went into the post office savings bank, where the precious contents of the cocoa tin, amounting now to over two pounds, were also deposited. Luke had never been so happy. He whistled as he cleaned out Promise's stable, he sang as he drove the rickety bread van up and down Whitfield's cobbled streets. He boasted to Elsie that he was in a fair way to becoming a proper acrobat, and that he had turned the humble Bootblack into a proper circus pony. And one early-closing day, when Mr. and Mrs. Hunt had taken train to York to visit some cousins, he proudly gave a display of Promise's tricks and his own riding and tumbling in Marta's yard, to an audience of his great-aunt and Elsie.

For the display Luke had dressed himself in an old shirt from which he had ripped the sleeves, a sash borrowed from Elsie, his gymnasium shorts and sandals. It gave Elsie an unexpected thrill of excitement to watch his thin bare muscular legs as they bent and balanced on Promise's back. She admired Luke that day, perhaps more than ever before, and yet she was annoyed with him too; she felt that it was she who ought to be leaping on and off Promise's back before the approving eyes of Marta, who clapped her hands, stamped her feet, and alternated loud praise with sharp criticism.

"My! Luke!" said Elsie, when the short performance was over, "what would me dad say?"

Luke laughed and wiped his perspiring face with a naked arm.

"Your dad don't know and never will," said Luke. He fetched a cloth from Marta's wagon and became absorbed in rubbing down the pony's hot haunches. "Ain't he some beauty?" he said, as Promise turned his head and mumbled his trainer's caressing hand. "He'd be a credit to any circus, so he would!"

Elsie's eyes flashed. "I shall ask me dad to let me have proper riding lessons," she said. "And don't you be too sure about his never knowing."

A morning or two later, Luke rose very early to go to Promise's stable. It was still dark and the streets were empty. There was a light in the bakehouse at the back of the Hunts' shop, but Luke wasn't worried on that account, the stable was some way off, down an alley way abutting on the river.

Old Dough-Boy would be sweating away at the day's baking as usual, moving heavily with his white cap slightly awry on his bald head, his shirt sleeves rolled up and his pale face made yet paler by a layer of flour dust. Franky Hinchcliffe, the slow-witted apprentice, would be gaping and yawning, and Old Dough-Boy would be grumbling at him. Franky, as Old Dough-Boy expressed it, crawled about the hot confined space in front of the ovens "as fast as two tortoises tied tail to tail."

Picturing the scene within, Luke walked swiftly and stealthily past the bakehouse. No sign of dawn yet; he would have a good three hours in which to groom and feed Promise and put him through his practice. As long as the van was waiting outside the

Hunts' shop at eight o'clock sharp, with harness looking clean and the pony well brushed, his employer never questioned at what hour Luke went to the stable. Luke hastened down the alley and unlocked the stable door, and was greeted from the warm-smelling darkness within by a low whinny that was to him like the voice of a well-loved friend.

"Eh, my cul!" said Luke softly, as he groped his way to the pony's stall. He moved a hand up Promise's back, over the shoulders to the hot neck under the thick mane. "My old cul!" He lit a lantern, measured out corn and chaff, filled the water bucket, and set to work at the grooming, whilst Promise munched contentedly, and now and then turned his eyes to stare with a trustful, though somewhat puzzled expression, at his strange young trainer.

"Now," said Luke briskly, when the manger was empty, and Promise, between slow sighs of contentment, had drunk his fill from the water bucket. "Now to it, cul!"

He put away the dandy brush and the curry comb and unfastened the chain from Promise's halter. Without waiting for any word of command, Promise turned in his stall. Luke took his precious hazel switch from a shelf over the door, made it whistle through the air, once, twice, three times. "Allez oop!" he cried, raising arm and switch.

Obediently Promise flung up his fore feet, but came down instantly with an undignified clatter. Then he pushed his nose forward, lipping for the expected reward of sugar. But Luke struck the stall with his switch and frowned. "You'll have to do better'n that, cul," he said sternly, "that ain't no tidy show."

Over the performance of this trick old Marta had shaken her head at the display. "The beast ain't shaped for it," she had said. But Luke was determined to prove her in the wrong. Promise should stand on his hind legs, and Promise should walk on his hind legs, or Luke's name was not Castelli.

"Allez oop! Ho! Ho! Ho!" Over and over again Luke gave "the office" to his pupil, and over and over again Promise reared clumsily, caught his hind feet in the straw, kicked the hoof of one leg against the pastern of the other, came down, shook his head as if in protest, mumbled for the withheld sugar. Dawn brightened the cobwebby panes of the stable window, the flame of

the lantern paled, the shadows of Luke and Promise, flung upward across the high sloped roof, grew fainter and fainter. Luke, oblivious of time and striving to keep down his rising exasperation, coaxed, scolded, even threatened. Promise became worried and dispirited, sweat trickled darkly over his haunches. He stood still, refusing to attempt what seemed so far beyond his powers to achieve.

For one moment Luke's exasperation got the better of him, he felt like crying; he brought his switch sharply across the pony's knees. Promise started and began to tremble, the irises of his anxious eyes bulged bluely, the long pupils reddened, water trickled from his nostrils in a stream of clear drops, the balked desire for the sugar which Luke so obstinately withheld.

Luke flung down his switch in a hot flush of shame. "Cul," he said, "oh cul, I'm bad, I am. I ain't no Castelli!" He prostrated himself in spirit before the frightened Promise, patted him, soothed him, gave him two handfuls of sugar, took a wisp of clean straw and wiped the sweating haunches. And feeling under his hand the pony's quivering nerves, he cursed himself for a fool.

Across the river a church clock chimed; then came the rising scream of the buzzer from Whitfield steel works. In the alley, doors were flung open, steps clattered over the cobbles and the echo of running feet died into distance.

"We'll do it yet," said Luke. "We've time. We'll rest, and then we'll do it."

Now it seemed that his whole being became a prayer that Promise should stand on his hind legs and walk towards him out of his stall. Luke was no longer Luke Castle, and Promise was no longer Promise; there was only one being there in the stable, there was only one being in the whole of creation, it was a being that understood what was required of it, and that had the power to do what was required of it. Between the boy and the animal this understanding, this power, hung like a tangible entity, it grew and filled the stable, boy and animal were contained within its all-embracing presence, it was creation itself, it was God—the understanding and the power.

"Allez oop!" Luke heard a voice speaking from the midst of the presence. "Allez oop!" It was happening! Promise was right up on his hind legs, his fore feet were prettily tucked

in, his back was curved, his neck was arched, his head high. He neither stumbled nor bungled. "Ho! Ho! Ho!" Nodding his head like a conqueror, waving his fore feet, Promise came walking on his hind legs out of his stall. "Ho! Ho! Ho! Keep it up, cul! Ho! Ho——"

The stable door banged open. "Good God!" Old Dough-Boy with his coat unbuttoned and his face still powdered with flour, lumbered in. "Put down that whip!" he shouted, and caught at Luke's arm.

Luke turned, ducked, tried to shake himself free, swung against Promise's flank, hit his head against the stall, clutched at warm horse flesh—and went down into oblivion. It all happened in a flash. One moment Promise was up on his hind legs and walking like a conqueror towards Luke, the next moment Luke was unconscious and Promise was lying across him, both knees bleeding from their impact with the stable floor.

So ended Luke's first essay at horse training. He was given the sack by Old Dough-Boy for "persecuting a dumb animal." Mrs. Castle went round to the bakehouse in tears, and Old Dough-Boy softened. Very well, for his mother's sake, Luke should be kept on, he should work in the bakehouse, but he should never touch the pony again; Luke and Franky Hinchcliffe should change duties.

"I told you, didn't I, as me dad would find out?" said Elsie triumphantly, to the crestfallen boy who met her for their weekly walk by the stile giving on the river meadows. "Not that I said aught," she added hastily.

Luke's heart was too sad, his mind too black with despair, to question the truth of Elsie's assertion. "I shan't stop," he mumbled, "I ain't no baker."

He didn't stop. Two days later, remembering the fate of his predecessor, he deliberately opened the till in the Hunts' shop and waited there quietly, with his hand closed over a ten-shilling piece, until Mrs. Hunt came in and caught him.

"Luke!" she exclaimed in astonishment, "whatever are you doing?"

"Thieving," answered Luke, "that's what I'm doing. Thieving."

"You wicked, wicked boy!" cried Mrs. Hunt. "Have you no thought for your poor mother?"

"No," answered Luke sullenly. "You can give me the sack now."

This time Mrs. Castle's tears were shed in her own back-parlour. She understood that it was no use going with them to the bakehouse. Her despair over Luke was even greater because of her recent hopes about him. Now indeed she understood with a dreary certainty that Luke was born to bring trouble and disgrace upon her; she pictured him growing up to be a felon, ever in and out of jail, she pictured him at last with a rope round his neck, and herself hooded in black, taking train at night to hide her shame and her identity in some far distant town. All these terrors of her imagination she detailed to Luke in the intervals of her bitter sobbing.

Luke sat pouting and saying no word. *He* knew what was to happen in the future, there was to be no jail and no hangman's rope, there was to be the glory of an accomplished dream. But his mam understood nothing, so in an anger that was as bitter as hers, and a dreariness that was only less dark because of the glory that shone somewhere a long way off, he pouted and scowled and answered no word.

"There's no one in Whitfield will employ you now," sobbed Lilian Castle. "You've lost your character, you've done for yourself. And don't think you'll attend those gymnastic classes any more, because you won't. I'd be ashamed for you to go among decent lads. To think that a son of mine—a son of mine——" Words failed her, she wept and wept, her head ached so badly that it was impossible even to work, she went upstairs and cried upon her bed.

Luke, too, went upstairs and locked himself into his room. What should he do now? He could of course continue at the gymnasium by paying for the classes out of his own savings. But his savings were for Castelli's, and he was loath to touch them. He might run away from home again, he was older now, and could manage it, he thought, so that he would not be discovered. But for this too, money would be needed. And run away to where? It was September, the circuses would soon be

going off the roads. Moreover not again would he risk the humiliation of being cast out by circus folk as a mere flatty. He must wait until he could prove to them by his ability that he was a "proper Castelli." And though he could do a few things, he had a very shrewd and humble estimate of his own accomplishments. No, he was not ready yet. But something he must do, he would not be beaten by a blubbering mam and a flour-splotched indignant Dough-Boy. He would work, and he would get a job of a kind that suited him, too. If only he could be cat in the panto, as he had boasted to Elsie that sometime he would be. No chance of it for this year, of course—but—yes, by gum, he had an idea!

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## X

IN a court off a crowded thoroughfare of Whitfield, a thoroughfare which went by the inappropriate name of The Heath, lived a boy called Scory Appleyard, whose father was a rag and bone merchant. Scory belonged to a mission, not because he had any leanings towards a higher life, but because mission membership entitled him to a number of free teas, entertainments, cast-off boots and clothing, three dips in a bran tub at Christmas, and a large chocolate egg on Easter Sunday. Scory was red-headed, sly-eyed, big mouthed, and hoarse voiced. His method of expressing himself, outside the mission walls, would have made Lilian Castle's hair stand on end, yet he possessed one virtue that Lilian Castle could not aspire to—an understanding of human nature; and this understanding, though often enough employed to further Scory's particular ends, yet graced his character (once these ends had been provided for) with the charm of a blythe and universal tolerance. Bearing no man a grudge for the disadvantages of his social status—indeed it might more truly be said that he changed them into advantages, turning the minus of poverty, slumdom and illiteracy into the plus of "knowing his way about"—Scory accepted every benefit that came his way as the proper perquisites of a wise man in a world of fools. When some charitably-minded lady had suggested that a course of free gymnastics would benefit those mission lads whose physique was undeveloped, Scory had narrowed his chest, slouched his shoulders, developed an obstinate cough, and presented himself before the charitably-minded lady as a fitting candidate for her favours.

It was at the gymnastic class that Luke had become acquainted with this young Whitfield tough, and though Scory took his training there with a light-hearted indifference quite other than Luke's enthusiasm and determination to excel, yet Scory was nimble, muscular and clever, and he and Luke had struck up



a friendship based on their common ability to show the other lads how gymnastics should be done.

So whilst Lilian Castle lay upon her bed and cried, demanding of her Creator, between tears, why, why, why He had thought fit to inflict her with so wicked a son, asking with a humble arrogance what she had done to deserve such an infliction, Luke, whistling cheerfully, made his way by short-cuts through the streets of Whitfield, dodging the crowds of poorly dressed people that thronged The Heath, and entered the maze of slums that bordered it to the south. The particular alley in which Scory Appleyard lived was called Balloon Passage, a narrow paved way with a high blank wall on one side and a row of low cottage-like dwellings on the other. At the end of the alley was a wide earth-covered court, surrounded by back to back tenement houses.

Luke went in under the archway that led to this sour-smelling neighbourhood, and passed a large rubbish dump and two water closets which served the sanitary requirements of all the inhabitants of Balloon Alley and Court. The cottage adjoining the water closets was occupied by a vender of ice cream; next to him lived a washerwoman whose nightly employment no neighbour inquired into; the third cottage was the Appleyards'.

Scory was in the kitchen playing with a tame squirrel. His carroty head and pale face gleamed through an atmosphere made dark by fire smoke, an assortment of Appleyards big and little, and the soot-crusted window-panes. He had no shoes on and no coat, his shirt was yellow with age and dirt, the bottom of his trousers were frayed into fantastic tassels, and from under them the intensely white skin of his feet shone here and there, streaked with the black plastering of a week's grime. Mr. Appleyard, an ape of a man, with thick red hair on his exposed chest, was sorting into sacks the various heaps of rags, bones, jam pots and bottles with which the kitchen was littered. Mrs. Appleyard, broad and blowsy, was suckling the smallest child, peeling potatoes, and scolding hoarsely. Young red-headed Appleyards, of varying ages and all, more or less, in a state of undress, tatters and dirt, played on the floor or hindered their father over the rag sorting.

"Come out," whispered Luke to Scory, "got something to

tell yer. It's private," he added. "Come quick!" He was ablaze with excitement, but he kept a grip of himself, as usual.

Scory got up, put the squirrel into a box, told his family in general to "keep their bloody hands off it, or he'd learn 'em when he came back," and followed Luke out into the comparative privacy of Balloon Court. It was Saturday, but it was not yet dinner-time, and there were only a few children playing about.

Luke selected an unoccupied doorway, that was scribbled over with crude drawings, sat down on a grimy step and motioned Scory to sit beside him.

"See here," he began at once, "I've been give the sack, and a durn good job. I got an idea. You and me's going into partnership, we're going to be in panto this Christmas as a couple of acrobats, me toffed up in spangles, you acting daft-like, but beating me holler every time. If you won't, I'll find someone else, but I'm giving you first chance, because you and me work together good. We'll think out the act; well, I've thought it out mostly, and we'll set to and practise for a month, then I'll see the Boss and get us taken on!"

"You've got some bloody hopes, you bastard, ain't you?" said Scory, who had taken a wad of stolen tobacco from his trousers pocket and was chewing manfully and spitting in imitation of his father.

"Will you, or won't you?" said Luke. "That's all."

"I will," said Scory, "and I'll beat you every bleedin' time, that's God's promise, ain't it?"

"My promise," said Luke proudly. "I want the job, see? It's all same to me who beats who."

"I'll make the bastards laugh," said Scory. "Cor! I could do it now. I don't need no damn' practice."

"Yes, you do," said Luke firmly. "We got to work it right. You don't know what I've planned out. Not ordinary flipflaps and rolls, but a tight-rope, and juggling and comic boxing. You'll fall off the rope, imitating me, and every time you come down, you'll take a glass of beer out of your pocket—I seen it done—and you'll drink it, solemn like."

"Ah," said Scory, wiping his hand over his mouth, "that's the ticket."

"And we'll begin to-day," went on Luke. "I'll go home and get me dinner and be back at three o'clock sharp."

So at three o'clock the inhabitants of Balloon Court were provided with a free entertainment. They crowded at doors and windows to watch the prowess, the achievements and the failures of the two would-be acrobats. The figures of the two boys, when stripped to the waist and clothed only in under-pants (provided by Luke, for Scory did not possess such garments) presented a contrast that added much to the amusement of their audience. Luke's body was slender, well-proportioned and rather elegant, with the shapely legs and arms, small waist, and little round buttocks inherited from his ancestors, Lucio Castelli and the ill-fated Erzebet; Scory was broad, bandy and comic-looking, with a full chest and wide shoulders that gave promise of immense strength. The onlookers nicknamed Luke "Button Bum" and Scory "Monkey Legs"; some of them jeered, some applauded, some pelted the naked backs with orange peel and cabbage stalks. When first this happened, Scory offered to fight one and all of them. But Luke cried out, "Garn! Don't lower yourself—act comic, act comic!" And Scory, thus encouraged, proceeded to "act comic"; he made a speech, thanked the audience for their kind marks of appreciation, picked up his tattered cap and went round soliciting more favours, assuring the hysterically shrieking women and the guffawing men that all contributions would be faithfully devoted to feeding the "little ones at 'ome".

"As a married man with a whack o' little kids, one just come and one more comin'," said Scory, drawing down his big mouth and twisting his features into an earnest and pathetic expression. A pailful of dirty water, emptied into his face, prevented him from finishing his speech, Scory fell flat, and staggering to his feet gave a bellow of rage.

"Box now," whispered Luke excitedly. "Box now, comic as you can! Go for me, knock me out! It's champion, we're getting it over, we'll make 'em laugh till they sweat!"

Dancing backwards and forwards over the orange peel and the cabbage stumps, Luke doubled up his fists and made feints at his dripping colleague, who shook the water from his eyes and struck out blindly.

"Come on!" crowed Luke. "Come on, Monkey Legs!"

And like a young and blundering gorilla, Monkey Legs came on. Luke floundered on the wet, greasy ground, made no effort to save himself, went down, turned head over heels to a stand and closed with Scory, whilst the onlookers, wholehearted now in their appreciation, cheered the combatants with such a will that the walls of Balloon Court re-echoed with whistling, stamping, oaths, shouts and laughter.

An hour later, under the archway of Balloon Alley, Luke, overcome with emotion, embraced the sweat-stained Scory. Luke had a black eye, Scory a bleeding lip, Luke's knuckles were raw, Scory's bandy legs were dark with bruises.

"Eh, lad," exclaimed Luke, "we're champion, we're the goods, a month of this and we'll show the world! But you needn't have hit that hard."

"Blimme," observed Scory, "I didn't know me bleedin' friend from me bloody enemy. Gawd blast me if I did."

"We'll make some gloves," said Luke. "Big, daft gloves. We got to work it so's we fight without bruises. You can sham bruise me, though, come to think of it, all across the cheek, with a handful of soot."

"Cor!" exclaimed Scory in admiration. "You ain't half a sport!"

When Luke, after parting with Scory, went home to Camershaw Road, his mother's eyelids were still red and swollen with weeping. She moved about the house like one in pain. Every look, every action said, "See how you have hurt me!" Oh, of course, she could see that he had been fighting, and that was only further proof of his wickedness. She wouldn't have been surprised if a policeman had come knocking at the door to haul him away before the beak. John's eyes blazed against his brother, he wouldn't so much as speak to Luke. And next day, Elsie, meeting Luke at the bottom of Camershaw Road, said, "I ain't marrying you after *this*, you thief!"

She flung up her head, pranced off, and banged the side-door of her house against him. But Luke continued on his way to Balloon Alley, unperturbed. Some day, when he pleased, he would explain matters to Elsie. But he hadn't time, at present, to waste on courting, he had to perfect his act with Scory, and

to this end he must direct all his ingenuity, all his energies, both mental and physical. He could not think of anything else.

It took all his energies. Scory was gifted, but he was lazy. He liked a bit of fun, he said, but he didn't know that he was particular set on acting in panto, after all. Why should he be? Lacking Luke's vision, lacking also the instinct to make perfect, the moral stamina, grit, and the determination to accomplish the all-but-impossible, which was a part of Luke's inheritance, Scory was inclined to treat these rehearsals of theirs as he treated all else in life, with a light-hearted indifference that sometimes drove Luke frantic.

"It's too bloody well like hard work," grumbled Scory one day, after tumbling off the knotted rope that Luke had erected between two clothes posts in Balloon Court. "What in hell d'you take me for—a performing monkey?"

"No," answered Luke grandiloquently, "an acrobat with a future."

"Future be damned," said Scory, as he picked pieces of grit out of his grazed palms. "I don't know as I reckon to think of no such thing."

And indeed it was very much in the light of a performing animal that Luke regarded his friend; an animal more skilful but not so easy to train as the willing Bootblack. And as he had held out rewards of sugar to Bootblack, so now to Scory he held out every glittering bait he could think of: good earnings, money to spend on illicit pleasures, the applause of the whole town, perhaps a photograph and a paragraph in the newspaper—sordid little baits that meant nothing at all to Luke's own towering ambition.

"Oh heck," said Scory, "may's well have another go at the darn thing, I suppose. But I'll cut your liver out, mind, and fry it in your own fat, if we ain't taken on after all this."

"We shall be taken on," Luke assured him. "I ain't worried about that, all we got to do is to make ourselves perfect."

"You talk like you was a sod of a missionary," Scory said.

But as with Bootblack, so with Scory, despite reluctance of mind and body, they both somehow had to work when Luke demanded it. There was a quality in Luke that compelled flesh

and blood to do for him all that flesh and blood found difficult but not impossible. Scory was now the mould into which Luke poured the surplus of his astonishing will. It was no good saying you wouldn't, Scory discovered, you said it and said it, but in the end you did what Luke wanted. Good-humouredly Scory acknowledged his master; there came a day when he walked the tight-rope without falling off, except comically and according to plan; there came a day when he was more agile on the rope than Luke himself, and his triumph over this fact was only a little dimmed by Luke's approval of it. The triumph that Luke felt was one far above Scory's grasp, it was the triumph of the creator working through his creature.

In a month Luke was satisfied that their act was, no, not perfect, that was after all too much to expect, but presentable, sufficiently so for him to set about the great task of getting it "taken on." Not an easy task, despite Luke's assurances to Scory. Day after day, dressed in his Sunday clothes, and with his hair carefully brushed and oiled, Luke hovered about the stage door of the Whitfield Royal Theatre, in an endeavour to get word with the manager, Mr. Hessop. And day after day a fat man in a peaked cap told him to "be horf" with him. Sometimes Luke got inside that door and sometimes he didn't. Once he got to the top of a flight of stone stairs and a little way down a passage, but always, in the end, the fat man appeared, like Fate, barring the way. "I'll set the police on you, I will," he warned Luke at last, "I'll have no more of your himpudence."

Meanwhile Luke kept Scory at his practice. He told that amiable youth that the manager had promised to see them in a few days. "Perhaps to-morrow, or perhaps the day after," he said, "but soon."

"Because of importunity" it has been written, and Luke, though he did not know the text, understood its significance. Even Fate, in the person of the fat man, must bow to importunity. There came a day when the fat man caught Luke by the ear and led him, suffering acute pain but feeling like Christian when he beheld the Promised Land, into the manager's presence.

Half an hour later Luke was pelting into Balloon Alley to tell

Scory that they were to give a demonstration before Mr. Hessop on the stage of the Royal Theatre.

That evening they were engaged for the pantomime season, at the colossal wages of thirty shillings a week each.

There were to be alterations and additions to the act, suggested by Mr. Hessop, but it remained Luke's creation. They were to be billed as "The Lads from Whitfield". Luke was to wear a skin-tight costume of red-and-white diamond pattern, Scory a clown's dress. Luke rushed to tell Marta, and they rejoiced, laughed and hugged each other. Marta alone knew the secret of Luke's dismissal from the bakehouse, and although she called him a fool for the way he had managed it—because why not just have walked out?—she understood that it had been impossible for Luke to remain there.

That night Luke did not sleep. Over and over again he went through his act before Mr. Hessop. The next morning, after John had set out for college, he walked into the back room, asked his mother to stop machining for a minute, and announced the glad tidings to her in a dry and off-hand manner.

Mrs. Castle could hardly believe her ears. She didn't approve of the theatre, not she, but then—thirty shillings a week!

"It's a mistake, Luke, I'm sure it is," she said faintly.

"No," said Luke, "it's true. It's good, Mam, we've practised hard, me and Scory."

"Who's Scory?" asked Mrs. Castle in alarm.

"A lad at gym class," answered Luke. "I picked on him because he's comic looking—and I trained him."

Mrs. Castle could only gasp. When John got home, she called him from the kitchen to come quickly. Laughing and crying hysterically, she told him the news.

John's nostrils twitched and his pale eyes hardened. This was a triumph for Luke with whom he was scarcely on speaking terms. For a moment it was difficult to bear. Then his better nature asserted itself. "I'm glad, Mam," he said. "It's a—load off our minds, isn't it? And—and—he's got some grit in him after all." Suddenly his mind clouded with a surprising anger. "Now I suppose he thinks he's the cat's whiskers," he said in a choking voice, "and that all the town'll be talking of him."

"He didn't seem to care," said Mrs. Castle, "he was cool as a cucumber when he told me."

"Pooh!" John struggled with his unaccountable resentment. "That's his cunning. Not but I'm glad, Mam, that he should find himself any sort of job. You'll see he gives you his wages, won't you? He ought. He's had free keep all autumn. But—panto! Sprawling about on a stage for folk to stare at! I do think he might have picked on something more respectable."

Mrs. Castle, with the glitter of thirty shillings a week dazzling her eyes, and blinding them to her real opinion, said, "The Hunts' Elsie acts in pantomime. It can't be that bad."

But John, having found what seemed a legitimate reason for his annoyance, answered, "The Hunts are all very well in their way, but you know they're not like us. They're—they're low, really."

"Oh, hush, John," protested Mrs. Castle. "Christians mustn't judge one another."

"I'm not judging," answered John, as he sat down to his well-cooked dinner, "I'm only saying."



## X I

JOHN's prophecy that Luke would become the talk of the town turned out to be a true one. When the pantomime opened "The Lads from Whitfield" proved a great draw. The display of local talent, as Mr. Hessop had foreseen, made Whitfield feel proud of itself. The saying "We can do as well and better than the stars from London" was in everybody's mouth, and the heart of every theatre-goer of Whitfield glowed with the reflected glory of Luke's and Scory's achievements. They became "our lads," they were cheered loudly and long when they appeared on the stage. They were encored three or four times when their act was finished. Hand in hand, hot, panting, flushed with triumph, they made their bows again and again before the curtain: Luke gravely and assuming an air of modest nonchalance which he was far from feeling, Scory grinning from ear to ear and waving his fingers to the gallery where, on Saturday nights, Balloon Court and Alley were represented in full force. Yes, Mr. Hessop congratulated himself on the far-sightedness that had seen good business in the employment of local talent.

There was Elsie Hunt, too, of course, who in a frilled frock reaching no farther than her thighs and a bewitching sunbonnet, danced and sang enchantingly as one of the Babes in the Wood. But the public was used to Elsie and knew all her fascinating ways, all her pretty little kicks and flourishes—in fact she was no longer a seven days' wonder.

"It's a beast that looks to be fed continually with a new sensation, is the public," thought Mr. Hessop. "The same shaped dish, but with a new taste in it." Half-way through the season he offered Luke and Scory a bonus if they would vary the programme a little every night. To accomplish this meant some hard thinking for Luke and three hours hard practising every morning for both of them. Scory grumbled. "I'm bloody well worked to skin and bone," he said. But Luke was, as before, compelling and masterful, and they earned their bonus.

Luke and Elsie, of course, saw each other every day. At first

Elsie maintained her attitude of scorn and aloofness. Sometimes, when Luke was present, she would fling her arm affectionately round the shoulders of her fellow Babe, a dark, dwarfish and big-thighed young woman (whom, in her heart, she detested), as much as to say "We girls have our own friendships, we don't need no boys hanging around." At other times, she would surround herself with every available male, and so surrounded she would giggle, preen, talk loudly, keeping a wary eye on the indifferent-seeming Luke, whom by no wiles could she draw into her net. Until one Saturday after the matinée, as she was flinking her way home to tea, she came face to face with him at the corner of the theatre, and anger welled up in her heart and forced her utterance.

"You think no end of yourself, don't you?" she said, tossing her shining curls.

Luke, who had been waiting for Scory, changed his mind and walked at her side through Market Square.

"You and me did ought to be friends, Else," he said.

"Friends!" exclaimed Elsie, "after what you done!"

"I'll explain that, if you like," said Luke, and explain he did. "I see now it was a daft way out," he said, "but that's why I did it. Now you know, Else."

Elsie said nothing for quite a minute. Then, "Fancy you being 'such a silly!'"

"Yes, fancy," agreed Luke. "I did ought to have told you before."

"Then why didn't you?"

"You—you didn't seem to want me to."

"Perhaps I was cruel to you, was I?" said Elsie hopefully.

"Some might call it that," answered Luke.

"But I don't see as I could have done different," said Elsie.

"No," Luke ruminated. "No. I don't suppose you could."

That sounded humble, though Luke did not mean it humbly. But if he was humble, why then, Elsie felt she could take him back. Not that she wanted him back particularly, dear me, no! There were lads enough to be had for the asking, even if they weren't lads whom all the town was talking of.

Before they parted at the bottom of Camershaw Road, Elsie said, "I thought of going a walk by the river Sunday night."

"I thought the same," said Luke.

On Sunday evening they met at the stile leading to the river meadows. They strolled arm in arm beside the muddy waters. They were engaged once more, though in Luke's mind the engagement had never been broken.

Every night throughout the pantomime season, old Marta, magnificent in her best clothes, took her seat in the front row of the gallery. She was an unflinching critic of Luke's performance. On such occasions as he excelled himself she would cheer herself hoarse; but let him come short, by the merest fraction, of the mastery she expected of him, and she would frown and mutter, leaning forward and shaking her head so vigorously that the green plumed hat was in danger of taking flight down into the dress circle. And though in the privacy of her wagon, when the performance was over, Luke was often rewarded with his great-aunt's enthusiastic praises, he also, at times, had to endure vehement scoldings, which a less whole-hearted artiste might well have felt that he did not deserve.

Mrs. Castle never went to see her son perform, she could not bring herself to enter a theatre. "Suppose I were to die in such a place!" she said to John. "How dreadful that would be!" She was both proud and ashamed of Luke, and she and John had a new grievance against him when he refused to give her more than two-thirds of his earnings. "You owe it all to Mam," said John. "What do you want to keep any back for? You don't need to spend any."

"I have to buy cigarettes," said Luke.

"At your age!" John was shocked.

"Well—sweets then."

"Ten shillings a week on sweets!"

Luke pouted. "I shall spend what I like," he said.

But he spent nothing. The ten shillings a week went, intact, to swell the savings for Castelli's Circus.

John, thoroughly annoyed at this new example of selfishness on Luke's part, declared that nothing would drag him to the Royal to see his brother make an ass of himself. Not that he disapproved of the theatre as his mother did; the theatre, he

pointed out, could be, and ought to be, an educational force. Reasoning at second hand from the convictions instilled into him at college, he urged his mother to "take Shakespeare for instance."

Mrs. Castle agreed that Shakespeare was full of good quotations. She had listened to some sermons on the tragedies at the "monthly populars"—evening services rather out of the ordinary, started by the vicar of Endcliffe parish in the hope of filling a three-parts empty church.

"And the language!" argued John.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Lilian Castle vaguely, "but of course the vicar missed out all that."

John smiled. After all, his mother had never been to College, it wasn't to be expected that she would understand these things. And perhaps she was right, perhaps it would be terrible to die in a theatre. He had only once been inside a theatre, and that was when he was working for matric. He had gone then to see Mr. and Mrs. Benson in the set play *Macbeth*. He had sat in the pit and repeated "Out out damned spot" to himself under his breath, and felt exceedingly proud because he knew most of the play by heart. But he understood how his mam felt about Luke and the panto, no he wasn't going—But what did Luke do to be such a success, he wondered?

He wondered until the last week of the pantomime season, then, one night on his way to an evening lecture, he took a walk through Market Square to look at the play-bills. The next thing he knew he was in the pit, sitting as low as he could, with shoulders hunched and chin in his coat collar, hoping that no one would recognise him. He felt guilty. Why? Because curiosity had conquered his pride and his annoyance with Luke over the matter of the wages, and his determination not to be interested in such a selfish boy's achievements.

But when Luke came on the stage, John's sense of guilt changed into one of acute nervousness, as if he himself were up there in the glare of the footlights, pushing a trick wheel-barrow that held the gesticulating Scory over the tight-rope, and tossing up and catching a shower of sharp knives, and standing upside down on a ladder balanced on Scory's foot, and performing incredible balances and somersaults.

“He'll make a boss of it, I know he will!” thought John. But it was not fear of Luke's injuring himself, but a dread that his brother was about to disgrace him, John, that set John's heart beating so rapidly, that caused him more than once to offer up a wild prayer for Luke's safe landing. But when, with the act successfully over, Luke stepped forward with Scory to make his bow, John, forgetting who he was and where he was, found himself cheering as loudly as any one in the audience.

At the end of the performance, he scuttled home by back ways, and neither then, nor at any future time, did he say anything to his mother or to Luke of where he had been. He was ashamed now of both his fears and his enthusiasm. Only, for maybe a week, or maybe a fortnight, he found it difficult to settle to his books, his mind being held and tormented by the realization of other ways of life than the way he had chosen, of other good and legitimate triumphs. And for that week, or maybe fortnight, his customary attitude of self-congratulation was lessened by a strange humility.

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## XII

ALL triumphs, however legitimate, however well deserved, come to an end. Luke, towards the end of February, began to remind himself that he must look round for another job. The pantomime season in Whitfield was over. Mr. Hessop took his company on tour through some of the smaller towns in Yorkshire and Lancashire, but in March he was opening again at the Royal with a short run of melodrama. He was putting on Maria Martin and Dick Shepherd, and a very popular piece entitled "the Angel of His Dreams," in which an innocent clergyman is entrapped into a compromising situation by a black-haired adventuress, compelled in honour to marry her, resigns his living, and thereafter languishes through two acts in a garret, suffering in saintly silence the drunken abuses of his wife, tenderly supporting her through thick and thin, through orgies of delirium, adultery, theft and murder, by "writing sermons for o-ther men to *preach*."

In his attic he is cheered by visits from a sunny-haired child who dances and sings for him, and this part was to be played by Elsie. Mr. Hessop also found he had a use for Scory, whose comic talent was developing apace, and whose broad accent and idiotic gestures went down well with the Whitfield audiences. Comic relief is an essential ingredient of melodrama, and in every play there was a small part—buffoon, yokel, or silly serving man—well suited to Scory's genius.

"I'm a muckin' star of the fust magnitood, blowed if I ain't," observed the astonished and delighted Scory. "But you can kiss me arse if I bloody well know how it's come about."

Scory was a big man these days; he smoked cigars and sometimes got walloped for so doing by his brawny-fisted father, he wore check trousers and flaming ties, gave away every penny he earned and never went near the Mission. "I ain't holding out me 'and for no more cups o' flosk, nor no more currant loaf," he said, "now I'm climbin' up the muckin' path to glory. Say, Luke, you was orl correck when you tells me as ow I'd got a future."

Luke was genuinely pleased about Scory's success, nor did he once take credit to himself for having set his friend's wayward feet on the upward path. He wished Scory well with all his heart, but their paths to glory did not run parallel, nor was the glory they would attain to the same glory. Luke's mind was pre-occupied again with his own future. His talent was not primarily dramatic, and Mr. Hessop had no further use for him, nor had Luke any further use for Mr. Hessop. Melodrama did not appeal to him; even had the rôle of hero been offered to him he would have said "no."

What next then? Luke was out of a job again. For some weeks he spent his time in what Lilian Castle described fretfully as "dawdling round." But in reality Luke was working hard, practising new feats of acrobatics in Marta's yard under his great-aunt's supervision.

"Aye," she would say, as she sat in the biting wind on the wagon steps, with an old horse cloth wrapped round her knees and her nimble feet buttoned up in high cloth boots, "aye, you've got it in you to make good, lad. Not that you're what I should call a ponger, yet, not by a long chalk. Your feet is clumsy and your hands is groping, and your back ain't that soople. You did ought to have been bending all ways when you stood no higher than me knees, if that Lilian Castle had any right sense which she never had, nor will have. But I don't say you won't come to it in time."

Spring was at hand and all the travelling shows in England would now be busy repainting their wagons and patching up canvas and harness, preparatory to taking the road. A thought formed in Luke's head that was too exciting to mention, even to Marta. Until, one day when it was raining hard and practice in the yard was impossible; then as Luke sat in Marta's wagon listening to her talking "circus," the thought became so insistent that it shaped itself in words.

"Gran'an," he asked diffidently, "would I do on a circus this season? Not on a slap-up one like Lucio Castelli's, I don't mean—but on a small one?"

Marta, who thought more of Luke's attainments than she ever admitted to him, answered, "Aye, lad, I reckon you'd do all right now."

So Luke went home greatly elated and wrote out an advertisement to a paper which was read by circus folk throughout the country.

"Young all-round acrobat wants work. Tight-rope, perch, tumbling, or juggling. Would clown."

"Though I ain't particular comic," thought Luke, contrasting himself to his own disadvantage with Scory. "But I *could* clown."

"Yes, I could," he repeated aloud, as a warm confidence in his own powers surged through him, giving him a feeling as if he had climbed to the top of the world.

What after all, he thought, as he walked through driving rain to post his letter, what after all was to prevent him from doing anything he set his mind to? It was only a matter of thinking hard, seeing himself performing perfectly the particular feat he wished to accomplish. That, and practice, practice, practice; but never letting go of the image of himself doing perfectly the thing he set out to do.

"Then I can do anything, me," he said softly, and the realization lit the cold slanting rain with streams of glory.

Very soon now would come an answer to his advertisement. Then he would pack his clothes into a bundle and be off, and the dreary unreality of life in Camershaw Road would know him no more.

To avoid the complication of his mother's curiosity, Luke had given Marta's address in his advertisement, and every morning, directly after breakfast, he hastened round to the yard to see if an answer had come for him. A week went by, a fortnight, three weeks; Luke's bright confidence began to darken with horrid little shadows of misgiving. What was the meaning of it? Was England then so teeming with young acrobats wanting work, that no one needed his services?

Marta said. "The profession don't know nothing about you, you see. Your name don't convey nowt. If you'd put Castelli, now, you'd have had a cartload of letters afore this."

Feeling that the name of Lucio Castelli was too illustrious for his modest attainments, yet not wishing in any way to identify himself with the family at number 19 Camershaw Road, Luke had chosen for himself a new name, Luke Ashbourne. "I ain't



going to be called Castelli, till I *am* Castelli," he said doggedly. And Marta exclaimed, "Bless thee, lad, may that day come soon!" For she understood and approved his feeling.

But, "hope deferred maketh the heart sick," and Luke was experiencing the truth of that proverb. Though, day after day, he told himself that it would be all right, that a letter would come to-morrow and that he would soon be off, yet he found himself in an increasingly restless and exasperated mood in which high hopes alternated with a growing feeling of depression. At home he disguised his anxiety by assuming an attitude of lazy indifference which riled Mrs. Castle beyond all bearing with him.

"Why don't you go out and *look* for work?" she urged. "There's a-plenty of jobs going. Other lads can get work, so why can't you?"

Day after day she nagged him until Luke came to hate the very sound of her genteel and weary voice. "All right, I'm going," he would think. "You won't see no more of me after a week or two, and you'll be glad enough for that. I guess you won't set no rozzers on me track this time, nuther. You'll cry, of course, but you'll be glad. You'll preach up a tale for the neighbours as isn't true, about me getting a job in a London office, or summat. And then you and John'll try to forget as I've ever been born."

Thinking these things Luke's eyes would cloud with what Lilian Castle described as a "fit of the sullens." But Luke did not feel sullen, he felt hopeless where his mother was concerned. Long ago he had decided that it was no good trying to do anything about his mam, she had never really liked him. The thought was not bitter, it was fatalistic rather; there was a wall between them that neither he nor she could scale. "I must get away out of it. I *will* get away out of it," he said to himself.

The idea of once and for all turning his back on Camershaw Road, of saying farewell for ever to stuffy houses and narrow streets, and the narrow-thoughted people who dwelled among them, shook Luke's being through and through with an almost intolerable longing. The thought set his brain alight with heady anticipation, it pricked through his frame with delicious tremors, as if he were in love, as indeed he was, though not with any

human being. It made his stomach feel empty and light, turned him from food, set his heart beating rapidly. Though the winds were still cold, and the weather uncertain, spring was in his veins, calling him away along a road that stretched, day after day, year after year, under open skies, under cloud and sunshine, heat and storms, under immense starlit nights and blazing noons, the road he would travel through good days and bad days, through mud, dust, hail, thunder, drought and deluge, in despair, and in hope, with vigour and weariness and vigour again, until it led him to the fulfilment of his destiny.

Luke, walking through the river meadows one day in Easter week, looked on the ground and saw daisies winking here and there in the dusty, wind-stirred grass. Spring had really come, then. Marta said that when you could put your foot over seven daisies at once, circus folk knew that it was time to set out tenting. Luke stepped off the path and walked on the grass. His foot covered first three daisies, then five, then a whole cluster, seven, more than seven, nine. "Time I set out," he thought, "time that letter came," and looking up watched small white clouds sailing across the tender blue of the sky. How fast they were going! And the water in the river, too, that sometimes flowed so sluggishly, was to-day, after the recent heavy rains, racing along as if it had not a moment to lose. Racing away from the stagnant little town of Whitfield, both clouds and water, racing away with all the world before them. And was Luke to be left behind? No, not this spring, not if he knew it, he was no longer a little lad, he was nearly grown up; in his seventeenth year, he was, and he had muscles hard as iron and a body staunch to endure hardships. He began to run along by the river bank, his thoughts urging him. In Endcliffe Bottoms, Whitfield Spring Fair was to open that week. Since nothing seemed likely to come of his advertisement, he would try to get a job, any kind of job, with one of the show people. Then, at the end of the week he would be "shut" of Whitfield, and somewhere, as he travelled the roads, he would fall in with a circus, and he would join it, if only as a tent man.

See Luke, then, an evening or two later, moving through the pandemonium of Whitfield Spring Fair. His shining hair, of a burnished light brown, is well oiled and brushed back from

his forehead in a long rippling wave. He thinks about his appearance nowadays, and Lilian Castle, who used to bewail his untidiness and grubbiness, now actually bewails the fact that he is grown vain. But nothing that Luke does will please his mother, because in whatever he does he is single-hearted, and how can the single of heart find approval from a mind hedged round (like a sunless plant confined within a prickly thicket) with a thousand complicated inhibitions and unreasoned conventions?

Luke is wearing his best blue suit, he has a narcissus in his buttonhole, and a triangle of spotted blue and white handkerchief showing at his breast pocket. He wears no hat, he walks with his head up and his back straight, but his movements are not stiff, easy rather, and graceful and precise as if he were balancing on an invisible wire. His eyes are alert and watchful, quizzical, yet straight glancing, blue and innocent, and with a hint of some deep smouldering passion behind them, which singles him out as a youth you would not care to insult. Not exactly a handsome youth; his nose with its wide-winged nostrils is somewhat knobby and shapeless, as if a sculptor, having taken a lump of clay and shaped the nostrils with delicate care, had then lost interest and left the rest of the lump more or less as he found it. Luke's lips, also, are too full and too large for beauty, they pout over fine white teeth and do not smile readily. His shoulders, moreover, are so developed that he does not look well in his ready-made suit, you would want to see him stripped to realize the comeliness of his muscular body: and the celluloid collar and bow tie conceal the rare beauty of his smooth, round yet strong and pillar-like neck. But he looks fresh, clean, confident and wholesome, and he carries himself like one of the elect; so that, as he moves on his way, you notice, with a pang of contrast, how mean, how poor, how undeveloped and how sickly are the white faces and flaccid bodies of the crowd of pleasure seekers around him, with their grinning ineffectual expressions, decayed teeth, unhealthy skins, pivotless excitement, and uncontrolled, clumsy movements.

In Whitfield Spring Fair that evening, there was the usual noisy and merry commotion of roundabouts, Aunt Sallys, shooting galleries, fortune tellers, peep-shows and the like, the

usual smell of oranges, peppermint, trampled grass, and sweating humanity, the usual hoarse and bawling voices, the usual blaring of organs, the usual loud laughter of youths and screams of maidens, the usual wind-blown flares that threw a flickering, ever-changing confusion of lights and shadows across gaping faces, whirling paint and brass, and tossing swing-boats. Luke, as he made his way from roundabout to roundabout, from stall to stall, ignored the shouted invitations to spend his penny, try his luck, have his fortune told. He knew his fortune, didn't he? His luck would be what he made it, and his pennies were being hoarded for Castelli's Circus. He was there with one purpose only, to find a job that would take him away from Whitfield, and find that job he would.

But, at close approach, something in him recoiled from offering his services to any of the showmen he had yet seen. It was not pride that held him back, but a feeling that any employment they could provide had really no more to do with him than his one-time job at the Hunts' bakery. He could not imagine himself turning an organ on the merry-go-round, or collecting pennies from the lads and girls who thronged the swing-boats, or thrusting rifles into the hands of semi-drunk sportsmen who fancied themselves as crack shots. None of this was "circus," or anything approaching "circus"; it was poor, common, non-creative, useless.

And yet his destiny beckoned him away from Whitfield, so find a job he must.

"But I'll look well round first," he thought, and drifting on with the crowd that eddied from this stall to that booth, found himself at last standing in front of a façade painted in geometric patterns of black and red. In the space left for the lettering was the following inscription in black and gold:

PROFESSOR LIVINGSTONE AND HIS PERFORMING PIG  
SUPPORTED BY  
MEG THE MONGREL OF HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

On the platform under this show front was the Professor himself, bawling out patter to attract an audience. On one side

of him sat a small, rough-haired terrier bitch, wearing a lilac sunbonnet and a striped petticoat, on the other side of him stood a black and white pig, wearing a red paper collar and a red paper hat with a green quill. The Professor was a tall man, with a large handsome face, and jerky, affected movements; he was dressed in an elegantly cut, though rather spotty, check suit and a grey top hat, and his patter flowed through an almost continuous, asthmatical laughter. Sometimes he paused to cough and give his tall body an extra violent jerk, then the laughing patter broke out once more:

"Oh, look here, ladies and gentlemen, this is Winkle, the clever little piggy-wiggy. Winkle, bow to the ladies and gentlemen" (Winkle bowed.). "Winkle, do you love me? Yes, you know you do. Give me a kiss then, Winkle. Stand up on your hind legs like a good girl" (Winkle stood up, the Professor stooped, snout and lips met, Winkle made smacking noises, the Professor turned rapturous eyes to heaven.). "Um! Um! Um! Now ladies and gentlemen, isn't she a sweetheart, and this is Meg the Miracle, who understands every word that's said to her. Attention, Meg, sit up and clap your hands for the ladies and gentlemen" (Meg, who from under the frill of the lilac bonnet had been dreamily watching the crowd, sat up rather mournfully and clapped her paws together.). "Now would any lady or gentleman like to give Meg an order? Oh yes, don't be backward, she'll do it, anything at all, anything you like to suggest. You sir—what did you say, let her effect an exchange of hats between myself and Winkle? Right sir, she shall. Now, Meg, are you ready?" (Dreamily Meg nodded her bonneted head.). "You are?" (Meg nodded.). "You're quite sure you are?" (Meg nodded.). "Look in my eyes, Meg, and pay attention. You are asked first to take off Winkle's hat. Now, off you go, think what you're doing. *That's* right, *that's* the way, take the hat in your mouth, now, Meg, come along here, knock off my hat with a swing of your head, what, you say you can't reach, all right, I'll kneel for you, Meg, I'll go on all fours for you, Meg, now then here we go, one, two, three, *whack*, never mind my topper, it's got no friends, *whack* again, off she comes, now, Meg, what next, the red hat on my head and the topper on piggy-

wiggy's, good girl, Meg! There you are, ladies and gentlemen, what did I tell you? Isn't she cute?"

Professor Livingstone stood up with the red paper hat on his head, and taking it off with a laugh and a flourish, exchanged it for the topper which rested askew on the head of Winkle. "If you care to step inside, Meg and Winkle will be delighted to entertain you for a full half-hour. A truly marvellous exhibition of animal intelligence! *Half* an hour, ladies and gentlemen. Adults two-pence, children one penny. Step up, step up, the show will begin immediately. *No* waiting. Full satisfaction guaranteed or money *re-funded*." With a jerk and a flourish the Professor parted the canvas curtains that draped the show front, and with a final laugh darted inside, followed by Meg and Winkle.

The crowd began to mount the platform, where all this time an old woman, in a mantle and a beaded bonnet, had sat meekly in a corner, with a roll of blue tickets, a tin plate and a black velvet bag on a wooden table at her side. The old woman had a perpetually shaking head and a long narrow face; her grey hair was parted and sleeked back under the bonnet. As she tore off tickets and dropped money on to the plate, her hands fumbled and her head trembled, and the beads on her bonnet glittered and winked like so many impish eyes. Luke watched her with interest. When the crowd had passed inside she began to transfer the money from the plate into the bag, a proceeding which evidently caused her much anxiety. Now and then she glanced over her shoulder and up at the sky, as if she feared some great bird, or demon, were about to swoop down and snatch her wealth away. She seemed to Luke like a human mouse that life had somehow trapped.

He stepped on to the platform and asked for a ticket. The old woman raised a pair of tiny eyes to him, she stared for a moment with such a frightened expression that Luke concluded she must be mad; with the start she gave, her fumbling hands came down on the tin plate and four pennies and two sixpences rolled off the table. Luke ducked in search of them. From inside the booth came the Professor's laughing patter. "*Wonder if he'd give me a job?*" thought Luke.

He came out from under the table. "Here you are, missus, four saltees and two tanners. That's the lot, ain't it?"

The little old woman seemed to be trying to nod her head, but the effort only resulted in her shaking it more violently. "My son, you know," she said, turning her tremulous face towards the booth behind her, "if I lost a 'appenny—Oh what a turn you give me! I thought you was a bobby!"

"Me, missus? Why?"

The old woman's head shook more wildly than ever. Her expression was sly, alarmed, pathetically cunning. "You never know," she whispered. "You may be had, one day. You can go in, don't pay me, but don't tell—you understand."

Concluding that this was his reward for services rendered, Luke thanked her and stepped inside.

It was a first-rate performance. Winkle waltzed with the Professor, drew a cart with Meg as coachman, jumped gates, walked on a revolving barrel, and, dressed as a soldier, pulled a rope that fired off a gun at Meg, who immediately fell dead. Winkle also selected by means of a long stick, working on a pivot, the gentleman in the audience who liked his drop, and the lady in the audience who liked kissing.

As for Meg, it seemed that, as the Professor claimed, she understood every word he said to her. She pointed out on a large map any place selected by the spectators. She picked out from numbered discs any number asked for, and from a pack of playing cards, any card. She stood before a midget piano and struck with her paw any note demanded, she chose from a miscellaneous heap of articles any article suggested. Towards the end of the performance the Professor offered a prize of half a sovereign to any one who could tell how these tricks were done.

"By clicking your finger and thumb!" shouted one.

The Professor stood with arms outstretched and fingers separated, but it made no difference to Meg.

"Then it's by the tones of your voice," suggested another.

The Professor did not speak during Meg's next trick, but Meg accomplished it.

"It's blurry black magic, that's what it is," shouted a tipsy man from the back of the crowd.

Luke, who had been watching intently and with a rising sen-

sation of excitement, suddenly heard himself calling. "It's hypnotism, guv'nor. You *will* her to do them things."

He had noticed that while Meg performed the Professor did not jerk his body, but remained absolutely still, also that his eyes never left the little dog, and that his face wore an expression of great strain, also that sweat broke out on his forehead, as if he himself were performing a task of immense difficulty. But Luke did not realize the solution he had arrived at, until he heard his voice calling it out.

The Professor shook his head, jerked his body, and laughed. He described Luke's solution as crazy, though ingenious, and spinning up the glittering half sovereign and deftly catching it, asked if any one had any more suggestions to offer. Since nobody had, he declared the performance at an end, announced that there would be another one in an hour's time, thanked his audience for their kind patronage and, together with Meg and Winkle, vanished through the back entrance.

With exclamations of wonder and approval, the audience drifted out. Luke went round behind the booth and found the Professor just stepping out of his living wagon with a pailful of slops for Winkle.

"Oh, ho! So it's the smart lad!" he exclaimed when he saw Luke.

"Smart or no, I bet I was right," answered Luke.

The Professor set down the pail in front of Winkle. He straightened himself, laughed, and after looking at Luke intently for a moment or two, put his hand in his trousers pocket and brought out half a sovereign.

"There you are, smart lad," he said. "I'm a man of my word. Only mind, no telling. I couldn't, could I, give my little show away?"

"I don't want it," answered Luke, handing back the money.

"What *do* you want?" asked the Professor.

"A job," said Luke at once. "Any job, so's it takes me out of this durned town."

"Looking after animals at all in your line?"

"I should think it was," answered Luke.

The Professor invited Luke to step inside the wagon. There he produced a bottle of sherry and two glasses, drank to their



better acquaintance, and, to Luke's subsequent amazement, drew from him his whole history.

Whether this self-revelation was due to the sherry, of which he drank three or four glasses, or whether it was due to something hypnotic in the Professor's cold blue eyes, leaving him as will-less in his hands as little Meg herself, Luke could never determine. When, in less than an hour, he shook hands with Professor Livingstone and left the wagon, he was engaged to look after Meg and Winkle for his keep and a few shillings a week (the engagement to run from the time the fair left Whitfield), also to clean the wagon, to erect and pull down the booth, to look after the Professor's three horses, and to drive the light, four-wheeled cart which, packed with the collapsible booth and the properties, followed the living wagon along the roads when the Professor moved from fair to fair.

"Mother has been in the habit of driving it," the Professor explained, "but Mother" he turned up his eyes and shrugged his shoulders, "has outlived what little sense she once possessed."

Luke was also to make himself generally useful and accommodating in any manner the Professor should dictate.

"You're a smart lad, but I shall expect unquestioning obedience," said Professor Livingstone. "And if I don't get it—" he laughed, and there was now, it seemed to Luke, something unpleasant about his laughter, "it will be your funeral, not mine."

"Danged if I can make him out," said Luke to himself, as he moved away through the fair ground after this interview. Luke was not walking like one of the elect, now; his feet strayed and every larger tussock of grass was an obstacle over which he stumbled. His head felt giddy and his limbs weak. "No, I'm danged if I can. But the animals is champion. Hypnotism, eh? Gor Blimey, I feel stinking. I couldn't walk a rope now, if my life hung on it. And then—telling him all about—who'd a' thought it? Four glasses or is it—hypnotism? No, four—Maybe I'm going to vomit. Luke Castle, you don't touch the stuff never no more.

### X I I I

NEXT morning, Luke, speaking in that toneless, it-doesn't-matter-a-dam and I'm-not-excited-about-it voice, in which he now usually addressed his mother, told her about his new job. As he had expected, she cried and "carried on." She said she would rather see Luke in his grave than travelling with show people and attending on a pig.

Luke said, "I'm going, whether or no."

Mrs. Castle laid aside her dressmaking and hurried to the fair ground, with the intention of explaining to Professor Livingstone that her son couldn't possibly, couldn't possibly . . .

She came back defeated. Professor Livingstone had assured her with tender politeness that it was a matter of complete indifference to him whether Luke travelled with him or no; but he would not promise Mrs. Castle to dismiss Luke and send him home again should he arrive with his baggage at the hour fixed for departure.

"Then I shall have to call in the police to stop him!" cried Lilian Castle distractedly.

"That, madam, is entirely your own affair," answered Professor Livingstone with a suave smile as he bowed her out of the wagon.

Lilian Castle knew she wouldn't call in the police, it would be such a public scandal; she wept through the day as she twirled the handle of the sewing machine, and her tears fell on to the brown silk blouse she was making for Mrs. Hunt. At tea-time, her tears fell still more copiously as she told John the shocking story.

John said, "I know how you feel, Mam, but may be it's all for the best."

"How can you say that, John!" wept his mother. "When he's going to—going to bring disgrace on—on us all!"

John assumed a solemn expression. But in his heart, though he dared not show it, he was glad. John felt he didn't really care where his young blighter of a brother went, or what he did, as

long as he didn't have to see Luke eternally hanging about grieving their mam. He got up, put an arm round his weeping mother, and kissed her. "We can't stop him, Mam," he said gently. "So hadn't we better make the best of it? When he's gone, there'll be you and me together, and home will be home."

Lilian Castle clung to the hand that rested so comfortingly on her shoulder. "Oh, John," she said brokenly, "I don't deserve it, do I?" Then, as John once more kissed her tear-stained cheek, she began to imagine what number 19 Camershaw Road would be like with just herself and John living there. "Home will be home." Yes, that was true; so loving, so peaceful they would be, she helping John, he helping her, living one for the other, with never an angry word spoken, never a frown even, just sweetness, and goodness, and love, she thought, day after day.

"Yes," she said, wiping her eyes, "you're right, John, we shall have to make the best of it. And after all," she added, with rising spirits, "Professor Livingstone is a gentleman. He's come down in the world, of course, but thank goodness, John, I do recognise a gentleman when I see one."

John said, "Yes, of course, Mam," though he didn't really see what that had to do with it.

Then Mrs. Castle had a fresh burst of distress over what the neighbours would think.

"Need anybody know?" asked John.

"But I must tell them *something*, John!" objected Mrs. Castle.

"You can just say Luke's got a job away, and that'll be true enough," suggested John. But both he and his mother knew that she would have to say more than this; place, circumstance, and every particular would have to be invented to keep Camershaw Road quiet. "It'll be time enough when he's gone," John added.

Luke was in Marta's wagon. Before Marta there was no need to restrain himself, and he told her his news with an enthusiasm that kindled a sombre fire in his eyes, took the colour from his cheeks, and betrayed itself in a voice that would only with difficulty remain under control. Though the new job was a humble one, and the wages low, it seemed to Luke of far greater

importance than the pantomime engagement. The pantomime engagement had led nowhere, it had merely brought him in thirty shillings a week and the applause of the town. This new job led out into the wide world.

"And what manner of man might this Professor Livingstone be?" asked Marta.

Luke tried to tell her, but he didn't really in the least know the manner of the man. "He's a conundrum," he assured her, "a bit balmy, I shouldn't wonder."

Marta grunted. That evening, arrayed in her best, she pushed her dauntless way into the very front of the crowd that was wedged, elbow touching elbow (for the fame of Winkle and Meg had spread through the town) in Professor Livingstone's little booth.

When Luke visited her next day, he found her shaking her astute old head over the Professor.

"The animals is *AI*," she announced, "but the man's a wrong 'un."

"What way wrong, Gran'an?"

Marta narrowed her eyes at her great-nephew, who stood before her so straight, so proud, so graceful and confident, so sure this morning that all he desired in the world was his for the taking. In a flash of mental illumination she saw him as an immortal spirit aureoled now with the bright rays of a splendid yet pathetic innocence. "Oh well, so we have all been," thought old Marta, "and we worry through. Leastways we that has spunk, does, though spineless ones may fall."

"Now, heark'ee, Luke," she said. "There's folk as is rough and hot-tempered yet has right feelings underneath, and there's other folks as talks smooth and pretty yet feels nowt that's decent. And there's dirty ways of behaving towards lads as gets men put in prison. Mind, I'm not saying 'tis so, and yet I have a hunch that so it is. For I've seen the likes of this here Professor bloke afore. But whether or no, you have to knock up against all sorts afore you're through, lad, and I aren't the one to hold you back. Keep your eyes open, that's all, and your body clean, till the time comes when you can take the girl you love."

Luke pondered. He considered Elsie, trying to define his

feelings for her. One day he would do with her what men and women did, and they would get children for Castelli's Circus. But all that seemed so far off, and though Elsie vexed him sometimes, and sometimes delighted him, and though he liked the smell of her, and though sometimes it was pleasant when they kissed and she sent shoots of excitement tingling through his body, still, he wouldn't exactly describe all this as love. It wasn't grand enough. It wasn't near as grand, for instance, as the feelings he had experienced in the Hunts' stable, that time when he and Promise turned into God, and Promise got up on his hind legs and walked.

"I don't love any girl, Gran'an," he said, after a long pause.

"Go on, get out, who's saying you do?" exclaimed Marta.  
"Your time ain't come."

Next morning Luke and Marta were saying good-bye to each other. It was an emotional experience that Luke had not foreseen, and over which he was deeply troubled. He had said good-bye to his weeping mother, and felt nothing but a sense of irritation and a desire to get the scene over. He had shaken hands with John and thought only "How he hates me!" He had kissed Elsie, the night before, by the murky waters of the Endcliffe river, and though she had clung to him a little, and he had felt manly and tender, and assured her in response to her urgent questioning that he would remain everlastingly faithful, and call no girl his girl until they met again, yet the parting had not greatly disturbed him.

But here, in old Marta, was the only person that Luke had ever loved. He realized with a pain at his heart that she was getting old, that death can be like the pounce of a hawk from a clear sky, waiting no creature's convenience, and that perhaps he might never see her again. The thought took the strength from his knees, and restricted his throat, so that speech was difficult.

"I'm that—fashed to—leave you—Gran'an," he said brokenly.

"Pooh," said old Marta briskly. "Life is all leavings and meetings again for folks as travels the road. Roads cross, don't they, from time to time? And there's more than one road leads to the same tober, aye, and leads away from it again. But if we don't move on, we don't get to no meeting places. I'll be on

the roads, meself, off and on, this season, and you'll see me yet, lad, in many a handsomer place than this old yard. Not but what it's been a good enough spot to rest me bones in. And a good enough spot for you and me to palarie of a winter night. The Lord bless thee, lad, here's summat for thy spending." She put a sovereign into Luke's hand. "Now say good-bye, quick, and be off on thy road, like all thy folk have done afore thee."

Thus admonished Luke flung his arms round her, kissed her once, twice, three times, and ran out of the wagon and through the yard—and felt, when the yard door had slammed behind him, that nothing would ever be quite the same again. He had said good-bye to Camershaw Road, with its monotony, its pettiness, its false values, and its flatties, yes, but now he had also said good-bye to something else: a valiance, a great-heartedness, a reality and a sympathy which—how over-poweringly at that moment he realized it!—had been a constant stay to his growing spirit from babyhood until now. It was as if, however far he might travel, and however much he might accomplish, an essential part of Luke Castle had been left behind, had died indeed, it seemed, and would sleep for ever in a little invisible grave in Marta's yard.



## BOOK TWO





I

Fair Ground, Macclesthorne, Cheshire,  
April 30th

DEAR Gran'an,

How are <sup>11</sup> keeping? I am A.I. The weather is good and business not too bad. Meg and Winkle have a great reception everywhere. I like the life, you know I would. Though I would rather be with a circus. Our wagon is champion. It has a painted ceiling, there are women on it naked with flowers and lads playing pipes, and under the ceiling picture panels of country scenes, cows and streams and such like. I am glad to say I have a comfortable kip and good food. The Profeser is a queer one, some days all over me and some days quite the reverse. But I feel sorry for that Mrs. Livingstone, by Christ I do. She kips in a little dark cupboard place and I hear her moaning and talking threw the wall. The Profeser told me she's crackers, he treats her worse than a dog. She told me she was afraid ever since he shaved his beard off. She says it was then her head began to shake, and anybody can see she is afraid of something. When she's taking the money she's shaking and peeping around as if somewhat was going to jump out at her. Then she spills the money and he narks her. I says should I take the money, but no, mother must do it, he says. I think she's watching out for him. There was a rozzer in the crowd once and she looks more scared than ordinary and goes over and pulls his sleeve. And he turns pale, and then ha, ha, ha, says he, and carries on. But times he's afraid too, I know, he jumps and laughs like a mad one. Also he sleeps with a revolver, so I think he's done somewhat.

No more now. I am printing this big and clear for you to read and it takes a time. Send me a letter with a X on please, which means you are all right. Put it in the envelope I inclose to reach me at Conglebury.

All the best from your loving

Luke.

Banbury's Circus, Llewlyn Roads, Merioneth,  
May 14th, 1905

Dear Gran'an,

Just fancy we are with Banburys. You can guess I am happy. We drove like hell three days to get here. Horses galloping and Winkle very sick in consecwense. It was funny what happened. We was travelling to Uppenham Fair and on the road the Profeser pulls up and says, I don't like Uppenham, I think we'll cut it out. And then he keeps quiet for a while and then he laughs and says, no, I'm damned if we will, and on we goes and come into Uppenham with the rest. It was raining, also there was a steam roller and the prads in front of us took fright, one rears on the wet flags and off they go and both come down a buster. Hamleys wagon upset and his little girl bruised something awful. There was a crowd running from all ways and three rozzers. Profeser gets down to see what dammage and one rozzer looks at him hard. So no sooner does the Profeser see that rozzer screwing him than he whispers Boy, we're scarpering. So we scarpered, soon as we could get shut of the crowd, and drove galoping into Wales and fell in with Banburys at Portdinlyn. The Profeser very sour-tempered and Mrs. moaning all night. Be sure he's done somewhat and goes now in fear of the lock-up. But I am very well pleased to be with Banburys, though as you are aware its but a small family show. But little Teddy Banbury is a champion rider and sells his act well. The Boss is boozy, no good that for a show. But the be vies don't open in Wales of a Sunday, so that day he is not so bad. Mrs. Banbury the fattest ever and the girls tidy on the trapeze.

The Welshmen a tough lot but all right if they take to you. What one does they all do. They like the clown and can't have enough of the girls. You should hear them palarie in their lingo. I know some already. Hoping you are in the pink as it leaves me at present. Nos ta sedra ducky back. That's good-night, how are you sweetheart in Welsh. Though mayhap its not spelled proper.

Luke.

I got your letter. Send me another X. Paper and envelope with this.

Circus, Newport, Montgomery, May 25th.

Dear Gran'an,

You was right. He's a wrong'un the way you said. He tried it on last night, so now I kip in the horse tent with the boys. He's bitter against me since this happened. I guess he thinks I'll split on him, the swine. But I don't split, I keep my mouth shut, only I ain't having any. Don't worry about me, I'm fine. Plenty of good company with the boys and a nice smell of horses. Old Jemmy, a good rosin back, has one blind eye.

Business is bad. The boys say the Boss gave them no wages this fortnight. The bandsmen all scarpered this morning, so now there's Old Banbury with a concertina and that's all. I don't think the Profeser gets no wages either, but hangs on because of the rozzers. Thinks perhaps they won't find him in Wales. He has died his hair and wears a moustache but that don't disguise him any. His face can't grow no smaller, nor no different, and you'd tell him by the way he moves though he wore a bag on his head. If he's nabbed I'll offer for the band. I could make shift with a cornet perhaps. Wish I could get in the ring, I've tried but nothing doing. Too many Banburys. Alice the girl on the tight rope can't do nothing but wobble. And she's getting on in years. But she's a neece of the Boss so that explains it.

Reply envelope enclosed as before with my love,

Luke.

The boys say Beckett's is travelling the south coast this season.

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Circus, Llanavon, Cardigan, July 20th.

Dear Gran'an,

He's killed himself with the revolver in the night. We heard a report and Mrs. comes out screaming in a flannel gown and a night cap. She had blood all down her bosom from him. I thought first he'd had a pot at her as well. It's true, the rozzers was after him all the time and that one at Uppenham must have reckognized him. He blew his head to pieces and the picture on the ceeling was spattered with his brains, and the blood running down. I guess he'd succeeded with some other lads before he tried it on me, and that was what the rozzers wanted him for.

But they come too late except to carry away his body. Winkle has been bought by the Boss. They say Meg isn't no use without the Profeser, so the Boss takes her free. Maybe I'll get the job to work Winkle. Don't worry about me because I'll get something. There's hell to pay this day with rozzers coming and going, The Boss scared and boozing hard. We are closed down and moving out to-morrow at dawn. I never see a dead man before this, and I hope I shant see one so bad next time. It upsets your belly. The route to be changed so I can't send inclosure, but will drop a line when I know. Here's luck. We all need it. But don't worry. I am in the pink.

Luke.

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Marta, sitting under the apple tree in the Old Bell yard, narrowing her eyes at the big, careful print and muttering to herself as she spelled out this last letter of Luke's word by word, paused in her muttering to open her eyes wide and exclaim fervently, "The Lord preserve thee, lad, thou'lt need it!" For reading between the lines, with an astuteness born of her sympathy for Luke, she came to the conclusion that he was not telling her the whole truth.

"Bad times," thought Marta, "we all have to go through 'em. But if 'twere in my power, I'd give him a lift clean up the ladder. Not that it would be the best for him, not in the end it wouldn't. Old fool that I am!"

It was true, Luke hadn't told Marta all. Since that alarming night when the Professor had revealed what "implicit obedience" on Luke's part was expected to include, Luke had been having a very thin time of it. With Marta's warning sharp in his memory, he had struck the Professor and escaped into the darkness, to wander about the dewy field for a while, and then crawl into the horse tent and curl himself up on some straw. But all amiability between Luke and his master was over from that hour. On the Professor's jaw bone was the red imprint of Luke's knuckles, which he tried vainly to cover up with grease paint. In the Professor's heart was a hatred of Luke which he took no trouble to conceal. Luke did his work to an accompaniment of

gibes, bullyings, sneers and threats. Payment of wages was deferred until such time as the Professor should find convenient, which time never came; food deteriorated, first in quality, then in quantity, until at last all Luke got were the few leavings that the Professor's crazy old mother occasionally saved for him.

"Hush!" she would say as with fumbling hands she produced from under her mantle a paper bag full of crusts, "*you* can have that, but don't tell." And while she spoke her head would go shake, shake, shake, and the jet beads would wink and glitter on the bonnet. Her little gifts to Luke seemed to provide her mouse-like spirit with a malicious yet frightened sense of triumph, as if by helping him she were paying off some score against her son. But Luke had a hearty appetite and the scraps she gave him seemed but to put an edge on his hunger.

Once she came tiptoeing to the door of the wagon with the black velvet bag that held the Professor's worldly wealth. She took out a penny or two and thrust them at Luke, but Luke shook his head. "That's thieving, missus, you can't do that."

"No, no," the old woman agreed, "we can't do that, can we?" And she tiptoed back with the bag and thrust it away under the Professor's mattress.

The sovereign that Marta had given Luke had gone to swell the capital for Castelli's Circus; so had his wages week by week. He had now quite a tidy sum in the post office savings bank. There was no need, then, for him to go hungry? Yes, but there was need. If he must to starve, he would starve, but he could not touch those savings. When he considered doing so, something stronger than hunger, stronger even it seemed than his own poor human will, rose up in him and said "No." His daemon, that he could not disobey. He tightened his belt, set his jaw and obeyed his daemon. But sometimes the desire for food was so urgent that if, when walking through the streets of town or village, he drew near a post office, he had to cross the street and run, lest resolution fail.

He pawned his Sunday suit, then one shirt, then another; and as the days went by he became hungrier and hungrier, until, like the prodigal son, he was fain to fill his belly with whatever husks he could scavenge. It was his first experience of physical hunger, and the painful outcry of his strong, growing body for

its due nourishment sharpened his wits and forced his proud spirit to resort to trickeries for which it despised itself. See him then, before the day show, sneaking into the tent where Sally, the Indian elephant, swayed and meditated at her picket. See him watching among the urchins who came with offerings of buns and cocoa-nut, for one urchin whose hand drew back timidly from the insinuating trunk. See him snatch from the timid little hand its would-be offering, and with a hearty "here, I'll show you how to do it," see him deftly break the bun or cut up the piece of cocoa-nut, and manage, while feeding to Sally smaller and ever smaller pieces, to juggle the larger part of the offerings into his own pocket.

Sally's eyes would turn red as she watched these depredations; Luke might deceive the urchins, but he could not deceive her. Once she boxed him on the side of the head, and sent him spinning against a pole, while the children scattered from the tent with squeals of terror. Not that Sally's indignation deterred Luke; eat he must and he continued to thief from her. But when, before the early morning trek to the next pitch, she ambled at liberty about the field, Luke hid, fearing the terrible retribution of her trampling feet. And, in doing so, suffered a torment of mind that was only just more bearable than his physical hunger. For Sally had been his friend, as all animals rightly were his friends, and he understood, none better, what it was he was destroying. Better a millstone round his neck, he sometimes felt; yet eat he must.

See him again, after the night show, waiting by the monkey cages, until fat Mrs. Banbury came on high-heeled shoes carrying their steaming supper bowl and the long-handled wooden spoon with which, waddling from cage to cage, she divided and tossed out the mess.

"You've a liking for simians, seems so?" fat Mrs. Banbury would remark cheerfully.

"Aye, may I give it them?"

"All right, get on with it, lad," Mrs. Banbury would answer, and again, as she turned her back, the pilfering fingers grasping up a piece of potato, a crust of bread, a few raisins, and again the overwhelming sense of degradation.

He might, of course, have packed up and gone. To foot it

from workhouse to workhouse back to Whitfield, would have been no greater a hardship than he was now enduring. But Luke had set his face towards his ultimate goal, he was not looking back, no fear, he was going on towards that goal, whatever happened. What did happen was that he became very thin, began to cough, suffered from headaches and fits of giddiness.

Old Mrs. Livingstone, with ever shaking head, peered at him out of bright, mouse-like eyes. "Now you know," she said. "I could 'a told you, but *now* you know."

"What do I know?" asked Luke indifferently.

Mrs. Livingstone turned her shaking head first over her right shoulder, then over her left. "That he's a——" she began in a tremulous whisper. Then she put a trembling hand over her mouth and mumbled. "No, no, I won't say it, I won't tell."

Luke offered himself to Mr. Banbury for work in the ring, telling of his engagement with Mr. Hessop. Mr. Banbury said, "Show us what you can do, then," and marched him into the big-top. Luke essayed a pirouette back somersault, turned giddy and failed. Old Banbury said, "No good, lad," and Luke went out and lay face downwards in the straw in the horse tent.

On the day after the Professor's suicide, Luke, having printed his letter to Marta, again sought out Mr. Banbury. He found him in the nearest "bevy," soothing his nerves with neat whisky. "You'll be wanting someone to work Winkle for you?" said Luke.

But Mr. Banbury, half-drunk and wholly scared by the events of the night, fearing for the good name of his circus, and utterly disinclined to have anything more to do with any one connected with the Professor, shouted, "You clear out of this! You pack-up and quit. You leave hanging round my show or by God I'll——"

Luke went back to the circus field and into the Professor's wagon. Old Mrs. Livingstone had made no effort to clean it up. The fair nymphs on the painted ceiling simpered from behind a spatter of brains and congealed blood. There was blood on the tumbled blankets in the Professor's bunk, there was a trail of blood across the floor. Old Mrs. Livingstone sat whimpering by the unlighted stove. She had the black velvet bag on her lap, and in her shaking hands the few sovereigns the Boss had paid



for Winkle. There was a stench of death in the wagon. Luke felt faint. He took his one remaining shirt, some socks and a pair of boots from a locker.

"I got to quit," he said.

Old Mrs. Livingstone appeared not to have heard him. She dropped the sovereigns into the bag and clasped the bag tightly to her breast. "Oh my son, oh my son!" Her face was puckered up as if she were weeping, but no tears came from her eyes.

Luke made his clothes, his post office savings book, and the "letters" he had received from Marta, into a bundle, and stepped to the wagon door. "So long, missus," he said.

"My son, my son!" The old woman moaned and whimpered, pressing the bag to her breast. "Oh my son, oh my son!" She fondled the black velvet bag as if it were an infant.

Luke went out of the wagon. "What will become of her?" he thought. "Madhouse—or what?"

The moaning voice dwindled into silence behind him. Not looking to right or left, or so much as lifting a hand in farewell to any one on the circus, Luke crossed the field, went out at the gate and down Llanavon high street. The sun was hot on the grey slate houses, the street was dusty and smelled of cattle. It was market day, and the high chatter of Welsh voices, the lowing of cows and the bleating of sheep was all about him. Passing a butcher's shop, Luke turned his head away, thinking of the Professor. What a foul mess, you would never have believed it! But mess was part of life, and the Professor was part of life, and that mad old woman was part of life. There were other things too, so it was all right, there was his gran'an, and there was himself, and there was in the end, his circus. There would be no boozing on his circus, and no professors; only clean, tidy animals like Sally, the elephant (who did right to hate him and it couldn't be helped) and clean tidy artistes like the folk who had thrilled him long ago on Beckett's Circus. Beckett's, so he had heard, was travelling the south coast, this season. Luke came out of the town and turned his face to the south. He was going to tramp till he fell in with Beckett's, and if they wouldn't give him a job, he would tramp on again, until he fell in with another show.

BECKETT'S Circus, in the seven years that had elapsed since it had provided the child Luke with the first glimpse of what he lived for, had not very much changed either in size or character. A little more prosperous, certainly, but still a snug little family concern, over which no risks were being taken, thank you, by old Sam Beckett, who, though grown a little rounder as to belly, a little balder as to head, was still as deep-chested, as loud-voiced, as irascible, and as good-hearted as he had ever been.

Old Sam's three elephants, Moll, Esmeralda, and Daisy, still delighted the children with their grave and clownish humour, his troupe of handsome sons and daughters still glittered and twirled and somersaulted on horseback and on the rings and on the trapeze. The daughters were not quite so handsome perhaps as formerly, for three of them had grown a trifle too stout, and two of them had become a trifle too skinny, but they were brave and they were dashing and they were clever, and they knew how to "sell their acts" as old Marta would have said. And of the sons, Jack had strained his tendon Achilles, and Alf had slipped his knee-cap and walked with a limp, and Matthew had lost three fingers of his left hand in a tussle with Cracow, the surly old bear (who had not yet succeeded in sucking Alphonse Lorraine's throat, as Alphonse had prophesied). And Tommy had come a buster on his back and could no more hold himself erect except when he was riding in the ring, and George had had his head cracked open by a falling quarter pole and was now permanently deaf in one ear—what matter? They were all good boys and hard workers, they smiled through their tricks as all circus artistes smile, ill or well, sad or glad at heart; in the ring they worked like slaves for their vigorous old dad, and out of the ring they swore at him and grumbled at him, yet respected him none the less.

And to make up for any defects of stiffening muscles and slowing hearts, there were the youngsters coming along. There was Roxy's daughter, Anna, now in her fourteenth year, handsome as they're made, and bold, caring neither for man nor devil,

and already a rider whose equal, old Sam declared, was seldom seen. There was young Herman Lorraine, who with his shrill voice and his comic little clown's rig-out, his childish antics and his grinning face, could be depended on to raise a laugh anywhere. And there were a horde of younger Becketts, ranging from two to seven years, not yet broken in, but already tumbling and somersaulting in imitation of their elders, and with their supple limbs, their sharp brains and their independent manners, showing promise of what the years would make of them.

Yes, old Sam Beckett had still good reason to be proud of his show, the years had, on the whole, rewarded him. Though they had brought him one great sorrow. Husky voiced, genial hearted, capacious bosomed Mamma Beckett no longer sat in the pay box. She lay under the earth in a cemetery in Kent, and two marble angels wept over her grave. Old Sam wore a plaited circlet of her dusky hair round his left arm, and kept a framed photograph of her dead face in a drawer in his wagon, along with her gold watch, a coral hair comb he had given her to wear in the ring, and her marriage lines. In the grave where she lay there was room for old Sam also, when his time came; till then, on with the show, and thank your Maker, when you thought of it, for happy memories. No use bleating after those that have gone, it disturbs their rest and brings back their uneasy ghosts to hover aimlessly round the tober they have had orders to quit. Or so old Sam believed.

Beckett's Circus was camped on high ground by the sea near the Chesil beach one night in August. The evening show was just over, and Mrs. Alphonse, in a voice hoarse with shouting, was inviting the departing crowd to step into the novelty tent, where, for the charge of one penny adults and one halfpenny children, they might see at close quarters the monkeys from India, the bear from the Rocky Mountains, the tailless hyena, the untameable wild cat, the man-eating leopard, the smallest pony and the largest rat in the world.

"Only one penny, only one penny," shouted Mrs. Alphonse, "you will find this show well worth a visit. Come along, ladies and gents, a-dults one penny, children half price."

Her voice, with its very faint German accent, continued its monotonous shouting, whilst her busy hands received pennies,

gave change, tore off tickets. The stars twitched and glittered over her head, the dewy grass soaked her feet, light raying out from the novelty tent illumined her flaxen hair, her firm handsome profile, and her statuesque figure in its wide sleeved jacket and long voluminous skirt. At her side stood little Herman, grotesque with his whitened mouth, his reddened nose, his ginger wig, and his baggy clown's trousers. He yawned and blinked, swayed on his small weary feet, and manfully straightened himself again, as he took the tickets from the folk who had paid their pennies to his mütterchen, and lifted the tent flap for them to step inside.

"Come along, pliss," shrilled little Herman, in imitation of his mütterchen. "See the great, beeg rat, see ze pan-ser what vill swallow you right up." Then yawns swallowed up little Herman's piping voice; he was so sleepy, so sleepy, but this novelty tent was *his* show, his and mütterchen's and pappa Alphonse's; every ticket he took meant a penny or a halfpenny for pappa Alphonse to put in his pocket. The Boss allowed pappa Alphonse this privilege because he wrestled so gallantly with horrid old Cracow, and because he was not very strong and needed to see the doctor often in cold English winters. So little Herman, conscious of his responsibilities and his privileges, yawned, pinched himself, and piped up once more his shrill invitations to the good-humoured crowd. He grinned all the time, too, because it was his duty in this world to look eternally funny, even when his head was buzzing with sleep; and he turned in his tired little toes, and coaxed his tired little body into comic attitudes, and now and then he pulled the string that made his ginger wig suddenly stand on end.

And sometimes, in passing, a genial gentleman would pat Herman's head and present him with a penny, and the penny was slipped into the pocket of his baggy trousers to be proudly handed over, by and by, to pappa Alphonse. Oh it was a proud if exacting world, this that little Herman had been born into, you lived up to its standards till you dropped, if drop you must. But little Herman hadn't reached exhaustion point yet, not he. "Come along, pliss, tickets, pliss," his voice shrilled manfully.

Beyond the novelty tent to the left and right, the wet roofs of the living wagons shimmered in the starlight; from opened doors

and curtained windows they patterned the darkness with squares of soft yellow light, broken sometimes by a dusky shape, a flash of colour, or a gleam of white, as a woman carrying in water, or coming out to empty a bucket, passed under the light. Amongst the wagons the dropped hatch of the canteen showed as a brighter glare, topped by a flurry of smoke and an occasional flying spark; behind them rose the shadowy outlines of the horse and elephant tents, and in the middle of the field the big-top, already half dismantled, bellied and swayed amid a confusion of lights, shadows, noise, and hurrying men.

There was a new worker among the tent men that night. No one knew where he had come from, and nobody cared. It was quite a common occurrence for out-of-works to try and attach themselves to Beckett's; like stray dogs they would appear hanging round the circus, and like stray dogs they would be chivvied off in the morning, when the show moved on. But usually they did not set to work with such a quiet air of being born to the job as this stray did. Usually they stuck about in the road, asked idiotic questions, boasted of what they could do, and did nothing, or whined for the loan of a fag.

But this young chap was lending a hand right valiantly, and seemed to know his way about in the unlacing of canvas and the folding up of stiff, unyielding wallings. He looked like a gipsy lad, ragged and dirty; his thick mop of unkempt and rampantly curling hair was sun bleached, his fair skin burned to a deep ivory, he was thin as a scarecrow, but he seemed to possess sturdy muscles and an inclination to use them; he spoke little; his voice, when he did speak, was deep for a lad's, resonant, with a slight burr in it and a northern intonation. He took the jocular remarks of his fellow workers in good part; when, occasionally, he smiled, his teeth showed whitely between full lips, and the corners of his eyes creased themselves into humorous wrinkles. A good little fellow, with something about him; the sweating, hungry men enjoyed having someone to bully in friendly spirit, and it was, "Hey, Moppits, catch a hold of this!" Or, "Here you are, Mush, look alive and shift them ropes! I'd have you know we work on this gaff!" Or, "Where's that there hobo as is looking for a job? Send him over here, I'll roust him!"

"You like very much to help us—is it not so?" Alphonse,

who had been dismantling the tiers of seats, threw down his mallet, wiped the sweat from his small face, and smiled amiably at Luke.

"That's right." As Luke, stooping to a pile of planks, looked for a moment at Alphonse, the light fell on his upturned face.

Alphonse pulled at a side whisker and regarded him more attentively. Where had he seen that face before? Alphonse never forgot a face, not in years and years and years. But this face was like one he might have seen in a dream, familiar yet unfamiliar. And the voice too, surely he had heard that voice somewhere? And yet he had not heard it. Heard only a childish echo of it, thin and shrill, touching in an assertion of independence that did not rightly belong to it, that belonged only to the deep, solid confident tones of which this memory was a teasing echo. What was it the teasing echo said? Something ridiculous, something untrue. It said, "I'm about all hours, I am." A sudden radiance of recognition and sheer delight lit up Alphonse's puzzled face. "Mon Dieu! I have it. The little grand-nephew. Come back here—don't run away!"

Luke, hurriedly departing with a load of planking, stood uncertain. Alphonse took a leap towards him over a section of ring fence. Luke laid down the planks. Alphonse seized him by both hands, kissed him on both cheeks, "Mon Dieu! I am beside myself!"

It was so long since any one had spoken kindly to Luke that this sudden demonstration on the part of Alphonse almost unmanned him; he felt weak and forlorn, as if he might shed tears. Also he was very much embarrassed. He had intended to keep his identity to himself until such time as he should have proved his worth. He felt so ragged, so dirty (he had been tramping from workhouse to workhouse for a fortnight) so unworthy of the name of Castelli.

"I didn't think—as anybody 'ud recognize me," he stammered.

Alphonse laughed. He was still holding Luke's hands, shaking them enthusiastically. "I recognize all the world—yes? I think—who is that? And then—joomp, it is in my head and I see clearly who it is. So we meet again. All the world and Alphonse they meet again. Did I not say so to you? One day we shall

meet again? And tell me then—how is she, my dear, my dearest Castelli?"

"Champion," answered Luke. "Leastways, when I last saw her, she was—But I am so—dirty," he protested.

"Dirty or no, you are the little grand-nephew. But grown—grown! The little grand-nephew who was so very young, and so very much scolded by the cele-brated Castelli when he run away to us. Now you run away to us again?" Alphonse chuckled. "Is it not so? You spend your life running away? Yes? Soon you shall tell us the whole history and we will fit you with a clean suit. When we have made the pull-down we will see to it. Ah, I am delighted! But now I must continue to work, and if you will help me—so."

That night, Luke, fed, washed, and dressed in a suit belonging to Alphonse, a suit very much patched by the industrious Frieda, but clean and tidy, sat in the Lorraines' wagon and told his story.

Elbows on table, chin on hands, Frieda listened, her calm grey eyes watching Luke with affection, whilst Alphonse, curled up beside her like a little boy beside his mother, fidgeted often, exclaimed many times, followed Luke's story with his small black eyes alight with eagerness, and with his small delicate face changing its expression with every change of Luke's fortune. Behind the pair, in a corner of the wide bunk, little Herman, who had rolled into bed before Frieda had had time to wash him, lay with a toy horse clasped in his arms and his grotesque clown's face solemn and serene in sleep.

At a louder exclamation from Alphonse, the child stirred, flinging aside the blankets that covered him. Frieda got up and tenderly drew the clothes over him once more. "When I saw you last I was carrying him," she said to Luke. "Now he is a living soul. And so good! Mein Gott, how good he is!"

"But you—you will stay with us this time?" said Alphonse.

"If I can get a job," answered Luke.

"I will see to it," Alphonse assured him. "To-night you sleep with us. We make up a bed for you on the floor, we have the blankets to spare. To-morrow I see the Boss. I tell him that a Castelli has come amongst us."

But this Luke would not consent to. He refused to trade on

that illustrious name. He was not in training, he protested, he could neither ride nor perform any other trick in a manner befitting a Castelli. He must remain plain Luke Ashbourne for the present.

"Eh bien," said Alphonse. "I tell the Boss a friend of mine has come to work for us. The Boss is generous, he will not say no."

The Boss did not say no, though Alphonse had more difficulty in persuading him to say yes than he admitted to Luke. The Boss had no need of an extra hand, could not afford to pay one either. The season was three parts over. What was Alphonse plaguing him for?

"But this boy is one in a million," said Alphonse persuasively. "You would not let go so great an opportunity? I know what he is, and what he will do. I may not tell, but you will see. He will live to be a great artiste."

"What's his line?" asked old Sam Beckett ironically. "Lion taming, or what?"

"He has no line at the present," admitted Alphonse. "He is weak, half-starved. But by and by—you will thank me."

Slapping his wooden leg with a riding switch, Sam Beckett stood in the middle of the field and looked sharply about him. The wagons were getting under way to leave the pitch, the horse tent was down, the rolled-up canvas of the elephant tent was being hoisted on to a horse lorry, the three great beasts were being led out at the gate by their one-armed keeper and his two attendants. The grooms were harnessing in the long teams of draught-horses, men were hurrying to and fro with bundles of bedding and clothing. Acrobats and riders, muffled up in a variety of coats and ulsters, for the morning was very chilly and the wind easterly, were coming out of their wagons, clapping their arms across their chests and getting busy with horses and harness. Women, scarved and thick-booted, were packing the last of their belongings, carrying in buckets, emptying refuse. Moomoo, the old clown, with a bowler hat stuck on the back of his bald head and enveloped in a long, black coat that looked as if it had been made for a giant, was collecting waste paper on to a pointed iron stake and raking up the littered straw into a pile which he would presently set fire to, for the Boss' strict orders were that the tober



be left decent. The Boss had no use for circuses that gave the profession a bad name by leaving their muck behind them. At Moomoo's side trotted small Herman, importantly carrying the matches, and round them tramped the rest of the circus children bearing rubbish to add to the bonfire. Their little faces were patchy from the chill of morning; they gathered shouting round the burning straw pile, flung in their contributions and held out their hands to the flames and smoke.

The sun, just risen, sent long pallid rays to shimmer through the rising smoke. It set the grey dew faintly sparkling and cast a frail radiance across the busy scene, cheering the spirits of men and animals with promise of a glorious day. But there was little warmth as yet in these pale shafts of light. Old Sam was buttoned up to the chin, the bristles on his unshaven cheeks gleamed in tawny luxuriance, his eye watered in the east wind as he stood, broad-chested, leonine, monarchlike, surveying his kingdom on wheels.

Old Sam's eyes were everywhere; now and then he roared out an order and his voice was heard from end to end of the field, above the racket of stamping hoofs, jingling harness, lumbering of wheels, the shouting, neighing, roaring, whining and barking of men and animals. Sam was apparently taking little notice of Alphonse, who stood beside him shivering in a threadbare coat and thick knitted muffler. But the Boss was considering Alphonse's request, none the less. He liked Alphonse, he liked Frieda, he liked the kid. He was grateful to Alphonse for the pluck with which he tackled the surly old bear that nobody else would handle. Once that bear had escaped and got loose amongst the horses, there might have been much damage done, if Alphonse, at the risk of his life, had not rushed to the rescue. Alphonse's fragile body was horribly scarred owing to that adventure. Old Sam did not forget these things.

"You will give the boy his chance?" insinuated Alphonse. "Because—Ah, mon Dieu, see there, the stallion——"

Alphonse brought out these last words in one hurried gasp, but even so they were interrupted by a roar from Sam so loud that it set his companion's ears ringing as he started running nimbly across the field, followed by the heavy and hurried stamping of the still bellowing Sam. One of those sudden mishaps,

against which a circus proprietor must be ever on his guard, had that instant occurred, and the orderly bustle of departure was now transformed into a scene of clamour, running, and confusion.

Salamander, the piebald stallion, gallant sire of many a satin-coated beauty of the ring, had broken loose. For the past ten minutes, tethered in a far corner of the field, he had been cunningly busy winding his tethering rope round one of his hind pasterns, fraying the rope little by little with repeated jerks of an urgent hoof. And during this performance his large eyes had been reddening and his little ears flattening wickedly against his shapely head, as he watched the placid ambling and nonchalant cropping of his enemy Damson, the big, docile rosin-back, who moved freely through a world in which Salamander was ever restrained, and who, moreover, during the shifts from tober to tober, trotted in harness with the beautiful cream-coated Marguerita, Salamander's favourite mare. A few moments ago, out of bulging, indignant eyes, Salamander had seen Marguerita sauntering down the field to graze side by side with Damson, had seen a creamy pink-flushed muzzle touch a "plum-pudding" muzzle in friendly morning greeting, and at this outrage to his equine sense of morality and decency, Salamander's hoof had struck out so vigorously that it snapped the last strands of the taut-drawn tether. Now with rope wildly trailing from furiously tossing head, he was off at full gallop to punish the philanderer.

Damson was large-bodied, spaciouly built and slow-thoughted, his back was like a table, his legs stout and squarely standing as tree trunks. Salamander was small, narrow flanked, and slender, a being compact of nerve and muscle, his thoughts were streaks of flame, his movements lightning-swift, he was upon the astonished Damson before that animal had time to realize what was happening, and with the first bite of Salamander's bared teeth, four front hoofs, two small and whitely shining, two large and darkly polished, rose simultaneously into the air.

The crashing weight of Damson, as he came down to all fours again, shook off, for a moment, his slenderer assailant. At a gallop Damson made off, at a gallop Salamander was after him. Ears flat, tails and manes streaming, eyes rolling and bloodshot,

nostrils dilated, lips back and teeth snapping, they met once more; screaming, kicking, rearing, plunging, they closed and parted again and again, as the whirling battle shifted from one part of the field to another. Snatching up whips and poles, men, Luke and Alphonse to the fore amongst them, ran and dodged, leaping at the waving forelocks, at the dangling rope, jumping aside as the plunging hoofs came down to earth, panting and calling and racing as the swift combat changed its place. In a wider circle round the two combatants and the pursuing men, at a full gallop went every free horse, colt and mare, dogs barking at their heels. Near the gate, among the packed wagons and piled lorries, the already harnessed draught-horses neighed and plunged in excited sympathy, snapping their backing straps and entangling themselves in broken traces whilst women clung to their foaming bits and strove vainly to quieten them. Children clambered for safety on to the hedges; old Sam, with his wooden leg, laboriously stumping in the wake of the moving battle, roared out a continuous stream of orders and oaths. Oh for his vanished youth, for his former agility, oh for his strong right leg that a Bengal cat had torn from him! Were they men, these sons and servants of his, or were they rabbits, that they could do nothing to prevent two valuable animals from murdering one another? Damson's neck was red with blood, there was a gaping wound on Salamander's croup.

"The rope, catch the rope, you fools!"

One had tried, and another had tried, to grasp the tether rope as Salamander flashed past them, but as easily might they lay hold on the lightning as it flashed across the sky, they went down like ninepins before Salamander's flying hoofs. Salamander was out to kill, his teeth met again in Damson's shoulder, and with a scream of pain Damson reared, his superior height and weight flinging Salamander momentarily off his balance.

It was Luke's opportunity and he seized it, earning in that instant old Sam's admiration and an assured place on Beckett's Circus. As Salamander swerved Luke reached his side and leaped and grasped his halter. He was lifted from his feet, he was flung sideways and bumped back against Salamander's chest, his knees were dragged along the ground, his shoulder was wrenched till it seemed that surely it was broken, but still he hung on; he was

being whirled over the field now, and sometimes his feet touched earth and ran, and sometimes his knees were bent and his body hung a dead weight from the stallion's head, and sometimes he spun like a joint on a jack, and sometimes he was tossed and shaken like a rag in a gale, as Salamander, snorting, kicking and foaming, wrenching his head from the encumbrance that slowed his progress, charged after the retreating Damson.

Green earth and blue sky, pursuing men and galloping horses kaleidoscoped in a giddy pattern before Luke's eyes, his body felt like a sack of bruised flesh and broken bones, but still he clung to that halter; he must cling to it, he had no other thought in his dizzy brain but to hang on, indeed so urgent was this thought that his hand felt like a clamp of iron, impossible to open. In the end he was conscious of nothing but that clamped hand, sight failed him, and hearing; there was only the hand, made of metal, it seemed, securely shut for all eternity, and filling the whole universe.

When his sight came back to him, Salamander, trembling and staring, stood cornered in an angle between two hedges with a crowd of men closed round him; when his hearing came back to him, someone was laughing weakly and foolishly, and with a flush of shame he realized that the someone was himself. He got up from under the hedge where he was sprawling and staggered against Alphonse. Alphonse put an arm under his shoulder, Luke gasped, the shoulder felt hot with pain. He laughed again, a thin, idiotic laugh.

"Come," said Alphonse gently, "come, mon brave, there is nothing more for you to do."

He led Luke away to Frieda's wagon, and between them he and Frieda stripped off the coat and shirt, bathed the shoulder, smeared ointment over his many bruises, and rolled him on to the wide bunk.

"There you will stay and sleep," said Alphonse. "All is well now, and by and by the Boss himself will thank you. You will never need to leave us after this, mon cheri. Ah, my Castelli, I would like that you had seen him, the little grand-nephew who was so great a hero!"

"Lie still, rest," said Frieda, as she covered Luke with a blanket.

They went out of the wagon, and it seemed to Luke that an immense peace filled the narrow space where they had been. From beyond the shut window, sounds of stamping hoofs, jingling harness, lumbering of wheels, shouting, neighing, roaring, whin- ing and barking told of the circus once more getting under way. Luke, sunk in a hazy content that his aching body had no power to disturb, listened to these activities and understood that from now onward they were a part of him and he of them. He drew a long, sighing breath of sheer happiness, and closed his eyes. By and by he heard the crack of Alphonse's whip and felt the wagon lurch forward. And soon, rocked by the wagon's cumbrous sway- ing, he fell into a deep sleep.

### III

WHEN Luke woke, the circus had arrived at its new pitch, the sun was high and the wagon hot, little Herman was standing naked under the window washing himself in a tin bowl. His body shone golden-skinned and fair as a flower in the narrow space, but traces of the clown's make up still whitened the corners of his mouth and his smooth cheek-bones. Seriously little Herman regarded his reflection in a tiny cracked mirror, then he lathered his face once more with soap.

"Hallo!" said Luke.

"Mütterchen is gone to buy ze breakfast," said little Herman, as he scrubbed at his face. "Ze canteen give pappa Alphonse a pain in ze stom-mack. Ze Boss ask are you better? You are better, I sink?"

"Right as rain," answered Luke, putting his feet over the edge of the bunk, and wincing as pain shot through his shoulder.

"Then will you pliss to dry my ba-ahk?" said little Herman, handing Luke a ragged towel.

For this office Luke had to use his left hand, a fact which did not escape the notice of little Herman.

"I sink you are not all completely better?" he said, as his small fair back shook and bowed under Luke's clumsy towelling.

"Shoulder aches, like," said Luke, "nought to signify."

"Salamader is rank," observed little Herman. "You cannot trust that *entire*. I run often from his great beeg teeth. You go out now to see ze Boss?"

"Aye," said Luke. "Cor!" he exclaimed involuntarily as he put on his shirt.

"May be your soulder is broke?" said little Herman. "Pappa Alphonse, he break all ze bones in his body, one time or anuzzer time. But he vork good. He vork good, and me—I vork good also, but my bones do not break. Zey are made of gutter-perch my bones, because Mütterchen told me so."

"That's lucky for you then," remarked Luke, as he gingerly manœuvred his right arm into his coat sleeve. "So long, kid."

"So long, gajo." The voice came muffled, for little Herman had his shirt over his head.

Luke went out into the sunshine. The circus was encamped on the border of a wide river. Swallows darted over its placid surface, and in the reeds that fringed it hidden moorhens uttered rusty cries. The orderly lanes of living wagons, horse lorries and tents were already in position, and beyond them the grey roofs of an old town glittered in the brilliance of the morning. In the middle of the field the canvas of the big-top lay sprawled over the grass, and a dozen or so hungry men, who had not tasted food since yesterday evening, squatted and knelt on its unyielding surface to lace up the quarterings.

Luke stood irresolute. He felt exceedingly happy, but curiously shy. "*Gajo*," that meant outsider. *Gajo, gajo*, the word teased his brain. It was what he felt, an outsider, here, so far, on sufferance, uncertain of his place. Last night the darkness had helped, this morning the excitement of Salamander's break-away had left no time for reflection; now, oddly enough, it was Luke's exploit over Salamander that had produced this feeling of shyness. "The Boss will thank you," Alphonse had said, but Luke didn't want thanks—cor, no!—he wanted work, he wanted to be allowed to stay, that was all.

He must go and interview the Boss, then. But, face to face with the issue that meant so much to him, Luke hesitated and despised himself. "Yaller, ain't yer?" he thought in derision, bewildered by his mood. "You'd like to go back in and bury yer head in a blanket, wouldn't yer? You ain't got no more spunk nor a louse, you durned pinhead . . . Cor, there he is!"

"You, hey, you!"

Hat tilted back, face red as brick, deep-set blue eyes fiercely shining, shirt unbuttoned, exposing his tawny-haired chest to the genial sun, old Sam stood on the top step of his wagon and bawled at Luke.

"Come over here. God's blood, are you deaf?"

The voice betrayed nothing but an urgency to be obeyed. Luke hurried forward, old Sam stumped down the steps and they met in front of the wagon.

"What's to do with your shoulder?"

"Nort, sir."

"Nort?" Sam Beckett took Luke's shoulder in a grasp that turned him faint. The freckled fingers probed and moulded. Luke set his teeth in an effort not to flinch. "Steady there," said old Sam, much as if Luke were a mettlesome horse. And, "Call it nort, then," he said by and by. "What's your age?"

"Going on seventeen, sir."

"Name?"

"Luke Ashbourne, sir."

"Um." Old Sam regarded Luke steadily and shrewdly, as he might have regarded a strange animal that someone had recommended him to buy. But his gaze, though shrewd and somewhat fierce, was not unfriendly, and his brusque approach had the merit of putting Luke at his ease. Doubtless, old Sam, in the course of his wandering career, had learned a thing or two about human beings as well as about animals. At all events Luke had not wanted any expression of thanks, and he was not getting any. He was getting a straight sizing up, and the straightness of his spirit responded gladly. This was the sort of Boss he would like to work for, he felt, nor did he any longer doubt that he would be permitted to work for him.

"Been with a circus before?" asked old Sam.

"For a short while—with Banbury's, sir."

"Why ain't you there now?"

"It's—well, it's a long story, sir."

"Tell it," ordered old Sam, "but cut out the trimmin's."

How much of Professor Livingstone's private character might be described as trimmings, Luke wondered? None of it, he decided, best tell straight out everything that happened, but swift like. Luke was about three parts through his story, when a young girl came towards them from the direction of the canteen, carrying a breakfast tray. Judging from her height, and the little breasts slightly swelling under her tight cotton frock, she would be about thirteen or fourteen years old, an age when many girls are conscious of their limbs and carry themselves awkwardly. But this girl carried herself like a winged victory, and the way her feet, in their shabby, high-heeled slippers, moved over the uneven turf made Luke think that in another moment she might soar away into the air, tray and all. Her legs and arms were bare, and burnt to a rich golden brown, her little head, with its



dusky hair screwed up in a dozen or so curling rags, was held very proudly, yet poised on the slender neck as lightly and delicately as a flower. Her eyes were big, dark, and imperious, there was something in their expression that was—what?—untamed, yes, untamed and untamable. Watching her as she drew close, Luke's story became disjointed. She was a girl you couldn't help but look at—some girls were like that, she made you think of an eagle or a panther, something all alone, anyway. She seemed to put space round her as she moved . . .

What was he saying? Yes, about Banbury telling him to quit. "And so I quit, sir," Luke wound up, with his eyes still on the girl.

"She's pretty," he thought; "no, she ain't, nuther, and she's got a temper, I bet." Then he looked at her mouth. "Cor!" he thought in amazement, for that mouth was so red, so perfectly shaped, so good-humoured, so alive with fun, and yet so firm of purpose, that Luke found himself staring at it as if he had never seen a mouth before.

Fortunately Sam Beckett was satisfied that Luke's story was ended. "Well, Anna," he began, "late with my breakfast, ain't you?"

"Out my road, you old vagabond," said Anna briskly, and out the road old Sam obediently moved, and Anna carried the tray up the steps and into the wagon.

So that was Anna, the girl with the goose feathers, who had once given him a lucky fourpenny bit, and ordered him not to lose it! Luke still treasured the fourpenny bit. Through the years it had become a symbol to him of something that was himself alone; not of his luck, exactly, because a man's luck is outside of him, of his purpose rather, and of what, despite good or ill luck, he intended to achieve. The symbol had perhaps been strengthened by Elsie's frequent attempts to wheedle the little coin into her own possession. Ever since Elsie had first seen it, she had desired it, and each time that Luke refused to hand it over increased its importance to himself, as of his own integrity that no wheedling should conjure from him. So through the years a little thing had become a big thing, and Luke still treasured the fourpenny bit. But the giver of it he had almost forgotten, until now, at her reappearance, memory rushed him back through the

years and he was again a small, disappointed boy, mocked and rejected, struggling against an emotion of self-pity evoked by a friendly gesture.

"Don't lose it, will yer?" Out of the past a little earnest face, surrounded by a drunken halo of goose feathers, peered up at him.

So this was Anna . . .

"Had breakfast?" Sam Beckett's brusque question brought Luke back with a start to present happenings.

"No, sir."

"Get yourself some at the canteen. Here's a tanner for you. No, stop a minute, here's five biancs in advance of wages. Ask for Walter Orde, head groom, say I sent you. You can get busy with the hosses. You seem to know how to handle 'em." Old Sam's stubbled lips relaxed into a grim smile. It was the nearest he ever came to expressing in words his appreciation of Luke's prowess over Salamander.

Luke "got busy" with the horses, though at first his labours of grooming, feeding, watering, bedding, and harnessing were performed tediously and slowly with his left hand. Walter Orde, a pale-faced, lank-haired little man of some fifty years, who had seen better days and could not forget it, told him there was no need for him to exert himself until his shoulder felt easy.

"Why should we exert ourselves, any of us, come to that?" asked Walter Orde, as he and Luke were preparing the ring horses for the town parade, which took place before the day show. "What do us get for it? Stiff joints all round, that's what. Here you go in Americky dressed up in plush and spangles (in his palmy days Walter Orde has been a jockey rider in Barnum's Circus) travellin' in your own wagon, workin' your own Arab; but you exert yourself and you come a buster with your spine agin the ring fence. So here you go in England, dressed in rags and tatters, sleeping in straw and titivatin' other folks' hosses, with a rat gnawin' at your spine whenever you stoops down—augh!—what did I tell yer?—there goes me back now, a-breaking of itself in two! But if I hadn't of exerted meself, where would I have been now? Answer me that."

"Couldn't say, I'm sure," answered Luke.

Walter Orde paused in his combing of Marguerita's flowing

silvery tail. He grasped the tail firmly in his bony left hand and the glory of it streamed over his arm like a torrent of moonlit water. He glared at Luke and beat upon the tail with the horn comb. "I'd of been ridin' in me coach and twenty-four creams, like Lord George Sanger himself," he said fiercely. "That's what I'd of been doin',"

"Does Lord George Sanger drive twenty-four creams?" asked Luke longingly.

"Twenty-four? Thirty-six, forty-eight he drives when he's minded to," exclaimed Walter Orde. "And how did he come to do it, you may well ask. He come to do it by not exertin' of himself. He come to do it by makin' of other folks exert themselves for him, that's how he come to do it. And here am I in me old age exertin' meself over the hindermost *hexteremity* of——"

But Marguerita, tired of listening to the conversation, brought it to an abrupt close by whisking the silvery torrent out of Walter Orde's grasp and buffeting it across his face.

"You see," said Walter Orde, as he wiped the tears out of his eyes, "a blow in the face, that's what comes of it. Eh, you onnat'ral termingint, hit me in the face, would you, after all I done for you? That's life, that is, the more you do for folk the harder they hits you. So take it easy, I say, why not? Ain't you ashamed," he asked, as he dangled Marguerita's scarlet bridle under her creamy pink-flushed nose, "ain't you ashamed you termingint to look me in me swollen eyes? Aye, you may well bow your head and blow into me hand, the hand what fed and fondled yer. Am I a slave to you, you mardy pig, you, or am I not?"

He was a slave not only to Marguerita, but to every liberty, rosin-back, draught-horse and colt on the show, so Luke soon discovered. His devotion to his charges was unbounded, though accompanied always with a voluble and unending grumble. Because of this grumbling he was known on the show as "Grandfather Grutch," a name he did his best to live up to. But, whatever he might say to the contrary, Walter Orde was in reality a proud and happy man. Proud of his shining-coated horses, and happy to be with them; he confided in Luke that horses had more sense than humans, they might hit you in the

face with their tails, but they didn't, at any rate, mock you with their tongues and call you senseless names.

Luke and Walter Orde slept together in the horse tent. There were other lads and men who helped with the horses, but they were also tent men and general hands, seasonal workers whose engagement would terminate when the circus moved into winter quarters. A tough, ignorant lot, according to Walter Orde, though Luke found them agreeable enough, and like all the members of Beckett's, good workers and honest fellows. These general hands had two bell tents allotted to them for sleeping quarters, an arrangement which Walter Orde took as a symbol of his superior worth and standing.

"Think I'd kip with them rabble?" said Walter Orde. "Not likely!" Though where he "kipped" was Sam Beckett's affair, and had nothing to do with any man's preference.

Walter Orde had his own camp-bed, with flock mattress, an army blanket and a moth-eaten leopard skin, complete with tail, claws, head and staring glass eyes. He told Luke that this skin had been presented to him by an Indian brave, "A gajo what knew a man when he sees one."

"I saved his life for him, see?" explained Walter Orde, but he refused to narrate the manner or the circumstances of the life-saving. "Never mind, now, never mind," said Walter Orde. "I didn't get no medal for it, as I should have, nor yet no illuminated address. So bury it, bury it."

Every man, even a confined pessimist like Grandfather Grutch, must somehow contrive a covering of glory for himself, if not a real glory then at least an imaginary one. Perhaps Walter Orde, as he lay down under his leopard skin, and noted with a surly satisfaction how magnificently the glass eyes glared in the light of the storm lantern—perhaps Walter Orde had forgotten that long ago he had bought the skin for a couple of dollars from a negro on Barnum's Circus. However that may be, never once did those glaring eyes rebuke him. "Walter Orde, what a liar you are!" Never once did the eyes convey that reproach. No, as the night wind stirred the storm lantern at the bed's head, and the glass eyes came to life with a small flame burning and shifting in the centre of each one of them, those eyes imparted only gratifying tidings to Grandfather Grutch's malcontent soul.

"Walter Orde, you are a hero, ignored of all others, maybe, but clearly seen by us."

Luke lay on straw, under a couple of blankets borrowed from Alphonse. The only other occupant of the big horse tent was the wounded Damson, for whose benefit the storm lantern burned all night. Damson's broad plum pudding neck had eight stitches in it, and it was thickly smeared with Stockholm tar, which sent a pungent odour eddying on the wind that blew in from the river and kept the canvas gently flapping.

Damson, his head bowed in its night halter, stood patiently, enduring without surprise the discomfort and strangeness of the situation in which he found himself. Why he should be mewed up in a stuffy horse tent, with a pain in his neck and a nauseous smell afflicting his nostrils, instead of browsing under the stars in the sweet-scented night air in company with the other horses, why this should be, it did not occur to Damson to question. Fate decrees and animals acquiesce every time, in the case of such good rosin-backs as Damson. Since you are Damson, you accept what comes, as it comes; whether it be applause in the ring, a gift of sugar from little Herman, a scolding from Grandfather Grutch, a kiss from the rose-flushed muzzle of Marguerita, or a wound in the neck from an infuriated stallion.

In a smaller tent, specially erected at the other end of the field, the fiery Salamander chafed on a stout chain, pawed the ground, snorted, whinneyed, and performed a night-long dance on his straw bed with all four of his high-hoofed feet, demanding to be let out, demanding to be rid of the wound on his croup, demanding his "why" with every irritable movement, calling to Marguerita, blowing out in angry breaths his contempt of all rosin-backs, to the extreme annoyance of Tommy Beckett, whose head spun with interrupted sleep, and who had left his warm wagon and the comfortable arms of his wife, to keep the wounded warrior company.

"The devil take you, you breedy screw!" exclaimed Tommy Beckett, waking for the twentieth time. "If I was the Boss, I'd have you *cut*!"

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## I V

LUKE'S sprained shoulder bettered itself rapidly. For the first week or two he walked the miles between one pitch and the next at the side of the four-horse lorry driven by Walter Orde. But soon, perched on the high seat, he was driving the lorry himself, and Walter Orde was reclining at ease on his rolled-up flock mattress, beguiling the tedium of the journey with shouted tales of the wickedness of the world, and the scurvy treatment reserved by Fate for those good men who exert themselves on behalf of their fellows. The fact that he had to shout to make himself heard above the clatter of hoofs and wheels on these occasions, was further proof, according to Walter Orde, of the unkindness of his destiny. "Take my word for it, boy," shouted Walter Orde, as he swayed and rolled to the rocking of the wagon, "the better you deserve the worse you'll fare. Even this mattress is nothing but lumps."

Sometimes they travelled all night, and Walter Orde, wrapped in his leopard skin, snored loudly and dreamed of imagined glories, in which, single-handed, he rescued a whole tribe of scalp-hunting braves from a whole herd of glaring-eyed "cats." And Luke too, though wide awake, dreamed of imagined glories, of the circus that he would one day call his own, as the horse lorry lumbered on its way, and the commotion of reverberating hoofs and turning wheels sounded before and behind him, interspersed with the roar of lions from the beast wagons, the squealing of monkeys, the yelping of dogs, and the rumble of men's voices and their laughter.

The stars shone overhead, sometimes like birds the stars moved among the tall trees by the roadside, the wagon lights splashed the road with patches of red and patches of gold. On and on, on and on, the slow procession travelled through the quiet countryside. On through the streets of little towns where folk lay sleeping, rousing echoes to knock at bolted doors and blinded windows. On, out of the town again, on, on, uphill, downhill, and along the level by the complaining sea, where sometimes the starlight

gleamed on slow-turning waves and sometimes moonlight made a glittering path. On between fields, where horses woke, neighed and galloped behind the hedges, on over bare moors where the wind whistled through the heather and curlews lamented, and you could fancy the spirits that inhabit lonely places lurking behind mounds or hiding in ditches until you should have passed by. On till the stars paled and the east brightened and the cocks crowed and birds looked black against the sky, and that great golden star Luke came to watch for dwindled and dissolved into the radiance of morning. And Luke shivered and yawned and dreamed of nothing but a cup of hot tea from the canteen and a long, long sleep on a bundle of straw.

But much had yet to be done before any one could sleep; the tents must be erected, the horses fed and watered, groomed and dressed for parade through the town, and Luke must wash and tidy himself and get into a gaudy-coloured shirt, leather chaps and large sombrero to ride in that parade.

The parade was headed by eight piebalds, drawing a heavy red, blue and gold chariot, whose sides were carved with dolphins and mermaids, sea-gods and sea-monsters, as a visible tribute to the indisputable fact that *Britannia Rules the Waves*. On the chariot, high-perched on triumphal throne, sat Britannia herself (Anna's mother, Roxy Beckett, grown somewhat stouter in these seven years) in a helmet and a flowing grecian robe, with a tall gilded trident in one hand, and a large gilded shield resting against her thigh. Chained to an iron ring at her feet, crouched old Cæsar, that most amiable of lions, and round her, in pretty and appropriate attitudes, were grouped the younger generation of Becketts, tunic clad, with little wings on their shoulders and garlands of paper flowers on their heads. Behind her stood the members of the band in their scarlet coats, blaring away on their trumpets, beating drums and clashing cymbals. Round the chariot, tumbling and somersaulting over the cobbles, clowns made merry, with little Herman piping in his shrill treble, walking on his hands, turning cart-wheels, inviting the populace to "Come, come all of you, come and see ze great beeg show."

After the chariot stepped the elephants, their insinuating trunks searching here and there among the crowd for offerings of buns and oranges. Each elephant was adorned with a crimson

cap with long golden fringes hanging down over the forehead, and on each was seated a turbaned grandee, with face darkly stained and a tin sabre flashing at his hip.

After the elephants rode old Sam himself, on stately Punch, the Lippizana stallion, who was wisdom and strength incarnate, amenable to Sam's least word, and with none of the fretful nonsense in his make-up that kept Salamander neighing on the tober whilst the parade was in progress.

Behind Punch came a troupe of horses, piebalds and roans, creams and sorrels, bays and chestnuts, ridden by the circus staff and the Beckett family, male and female, dressed up as cowboys, red Indians, highwaymen and gallants. How drowsy they were, some of these highwaymen and gallants! Their heads nodded as they rode, and from under their gaudy apparel peeped soiled workaday trousers and muddy boots that there had been no time to change.

Next came the beasts' wagons, then the big grizzly, Cracow, tightly muzzled and led by Alphonse. After the bear came a valiant company of Shetland ponies, four abreast, their little feet beating energetically on the roadway, their little heads tossing, their thick manes tumbling across their eyes. These Shetlands drew a conveyance shaped like a swan; the ponies were black with pink trappings, the swan was white, and between its curved wings stood proud young Anna in a pink ballet skirt. On each of her shoulders there perched a white dove, and on her dusky hair, now free of its confining rags and arranged in thick curls, nestled a third dove, its pink feet entangled in the curls, its wings occasionally lifting in alarm as the ponies strained and pattered and the swan carriage jolted forward.

On the end of its long white neck the head of the swan nodded and jerked; in the carriage Anna's arrow-straight body vibrated from toes to crown in rhythm to the ponies' bustling movements. She held the reins disdainfully, nor did she once glance at the jostling crowds. She might have been driving her pigmy team over a desert, a little queen of loneliness, journeying to meet some far-off king visible to herself alone, so intent on her own thoughts she seemed, so remote in her pride and her grace, so infinite the space she put between herself and the thronged street.

To a hypercritical observer, perhaps, the swan carriage, with



its spasmodically jerking head and quavering wings, might appear a trifle tawdry, so indeed might Anna's heavily bunched and patently artificial curls, and also her pink muslin ballet dress looped up with bunches of forget-me-nots that were crushed by daily packing; but in the little girl herself was a dignity that made you forget these things; no imperial princess in the world could have held herself with more royal assurance, or suffered the loud exclamations of admiring men and women, and the whistles and kissing noises and catcalls of rude boys with more sublime indifference.

Behind the swan carriage followed a troupe of performing dogs in paper collars, with their trainer George Beckett, very sportingly attired in check suit and leather gaiters, marching up and down among them cracking a long whip, and behind the dogs came a cage full of monkeys drawn by two great Danes, and so, with a rabble of town children in its wake, the grand procession ended. By the time it had traversed the main streets of the town and trailed its way back to the circus lot, and the horses had been eased of their trappings and turned out to graze, the longed-for sleep that Luke had been promising himself was of very short duration.

"Eh, Lord God," Walter Orde groaned, as he dropped on to his bed and covered himself with his leopard skin, "eh, Lord God, what a life! If winter don't come soon, Walter Orde won't be alive to see it. In winter I'll lay me down and I'll sleep the clock round, and let the prads go to hell——"

But Luke, stretched out on his straw bed, was asleep before Walter Orde had finished his grumble.

In that first season with Beckett's, Luke's experience of the ring was confined to brief entrances and exits when, buttoned up in pale blue livery, he led in and led out Marguerita or Sultan or Salamander or Punch, or leaped between the acts to lay down strips of crimson carpet for the acrobats, to help set-up trampoline or wire, clear away spring-board or pedestals, or hold one of the hoops through which Trixy, the Shetland, jumped with such agility. Humble offices these, at which many a lad, as ambitious as Luke, but less far-sighted, might well have chafed. But Luke did not chafe. It was necessary, wasn't it, to learn the ropes? And every task, even the most menial, was grist to the mill of that

learning. By the time he had his own circus there was nothing, from the effect of heat or damp on a trapeze tackle to the effect of music or light on a lion's nerves, that he would not understand.

So every humble task that was given him to do, Luke did as whole-heartedly as if on it alone depended the success or failure of Beckett's Circus. And when there was nothing for him to do, he stood quietly by the tall red curtains that draped the performers' entrance and watched and noted. Watched not only the artistes and the animals but the audience also, for they, too, were an essential part of the whole. Without audience a circus could hardly be said to exist, and Luke soon came to realize the surprising differences between the audience of one town and the audience of another. Some audiences were easy, generous with their applause and loud with their laughter, some were critical and "high-hat," some heavy as lead. And to every different type of audience both artistes and animals reacted. Without applause the animals saddened and sulked through their tricks; against a weight of inertia clowns sweated and laboured over their jokes and wise-cracks; whilst, in the face of a withering blast of snobbish superiority from the two-shilling seats, women artistes failed to "sell their acts" and, those acts over, left the ring in rage or in tears, according to their several temperaments.

Let but the audience, however, be cheerful and good-humoured, prepared to enjoy themselves and to accept the hard seats and the chilly autumn breezes as part of the fun, then with what gusto and abandon, with what speed, high mirth and exquisite skill did the whole performance move! Then with what ardour and grace the acrobats twirled and sparkled, how friskily the horses pranced, how nimbly and with what joyous barks the dogs skipped, how playfully the elephants gambled, with what lightning rapidity the lions leaped on and off their pedestals—whilst, between the acts, the clowns, capering and sprawling amid applause and laughter, became so light-hearted that they were obliged to laugh at their own jokes, and even the old grizzly forgot that he bore a grudge against the world.

On such occasions, and they were most frequent, for Sam Beckett was as shrewd a showman as ever travelled, Luke, standing quietly by the back entrance, would feel his heart swell and his pride mount, as if he owned the show; on such occasions

he could have danced, shouted, sung, in a delirium of sympathetic achievement. But when things went wrong he suffered acutely, setting his teeth, clenching his hands, pitting his nervous energy against the failure, as if performers and audience were a load he were dragging, as if, by spiritual exertion on his part, he could swing that load up and up and up, till he swung it clear of the downward tug of gravid dullness into some buoyant region where all creation danced.

After the pull-down at night, if there was no journey to take until the next morning, Luke would make his way through lanes of darkness that were splashed here and there with the yellow lights from tents and curtained windows, to the Lorraines' living-wagon. There, in an atmosphere approaching roasting point from the combined heat of stove and lamp, he would drink coffee with Alphonse and Frieda, and talk over the successes or failures of the day's performances, how so and so had excelled himself, or such and such an animal was certainly off colour.

Walter Orde grumbled at Luke over these visits of his. Grandfather Grutch had taken Luke under his surly wing (the lad had a feeling for horses, that was Grandfather Grutch's reason) but he did not appreciate sharing his nurseling with another.

"Why don't yer get to sleep whilst yer can?" he demanded. "Unhealthy I calls it, stewing yer brains to jelly along of that Frenchy what spews his lungs up whenever a breeze comes nigh him. What yer sees in him beats me, sit him on a prad and he falls off. Can't so much as somersault over the roller wi'out landing in a dead faint."

"He is very brave and very kind," answered Luke. "He can't help his head swimming."

"I'd swim his head for him," growled Walter Orde. "Gives hisself airs, that's what he does. There isn't a blinkin' performer on this gaff what doesn't give himself airs. There's better men to be found on this gaff than any of them what sleeps on their feather beds in their wagons. And where are these better men? In the tents, that's where they are, in the tents, along with the hosses. Oh *no*, we don't reckernise them, they're only grooms an' rough necks, we're *artistes*, we are—till the old bear sharpens his claws. Then we bleed and squeal same as another. Aye, you may laugh, but I know what I'm talking about. I've worked

on a show as *was* a show, haven't I? I was *Mister Orde* to the grooms and rough necks in them days, and '*Walter old man*' to the Boss, and '*Wally Darlin*' to the Boss's daughter. And what am I now? '*Ere! You!*' That's all I am. And that's all you are; make no mistake about it. Of all the snobbery joints I ever travelled with, this joint beats the lot. But you don't catch me piddling down their backs, like some I could name."

"We can't all be top dogs," answered Luke simply.

The convention that Walter Orde grumbled at seemed to Luke natural enough. On Beckett's Circus, as indeed on all circuses in those days, though all must labour together to keep the show going, yet there was, none the less, a distinct social gulf fixed between the artistes and the mere hands. It was a distinction not of class but of accomplishment. You might speak ungrammatically and ignore your "h's," you might, indeed, be unable to read or write, but if you were a skilled rider, or a clever juggler, or a lion trainer, or a wire-walker, or a contortionist, a spring-board artiste or a perchist, you were an aristocrat of the circus and, as such, you held yourself aloof in spirit from grooms and tent men, and would have done so none the less had those grooms and tent men been gentlemen born. You worked with them, of course, for except on tip-top shows, such as Lord George Sanger's, every artiste must take his share of the common work, and you were genial to them, for it is your nature to be genial; all circus folk are genial (an old grutch like Walter Orde is only the exception that proves the rule) but the fact remains, you are an aristocrat; you show it in your bearing, your gait, your expression, your unassuming yet abundantly evident assurance that you are one of those who inherit the earth, your conviction that in your own particular sphere no man is your equal. You do not assert your superiority over ordinary mortals, you have no need, it is a quality that shines from you.

So, in that first season on Beckett's, Luke might make the acquaintance of circus artistes only from a respectful distance, as a man may make the acquaintance of the stars in heaven that yet shed down their friendly light for him as for all others. This enforced division between the earth-bound and the company of the celestials did not trouble Luke as it troubled Walter Orde. Conscious within himself of the celestial fire, Luke understood it.

All in good time his spirit would mount that invisible ladder which stretched between earth and heaven, all in good time the grub that is destined for wings unfolds those wings; meantime, in company with the wingless, it waits and learns.

So it was not at all in the tradition for Alphonse to invite one of the hands into his wagon and treat him as an equal. But there, you could never account for the peculiar whims of Alphonse. In the eyes of the Beckett family Alphonse was a good little fellow but a bit of a sap-head, one whom the Boss kept on out of pity (the Boss was like that) rather than from any good he was to the show. The Boss was too soft-hearted, no lion for all his roaring voice. In the opinion of Jack and Alf and Matthew and George and Tommy Beckett, the Boss lost the show thousands of pounds a year through this soft heart of his; each one of the sons was convinced that under his own management the show would be very different. But, there you were, any one, they agreed (with the unfortunate exception of Jack and Alf, and Matthew and George and Tommy) could twist the Boss round his little finger. Fact of the matter was, the Boss was past his prime; but he was a grand fellow, none the less, and any one who questioned that would pretty soon find the fist of Jack, Alf, Matthew, George or Tommy in his black-guardly eye. But it was the privilege of sons to criticise.

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## V

ONE stormy October afternoon, when the circus was encamped in a valley meadow on the outskirts of a small town in Kent, Luke, who had taken four draught horses up to the blacksmith's to be shod, came clattering back through a pelt of rain to find the big-top lifting and quivering in the wind like a great captive bird whose one ambition is to spread its wings and sail off into the stormy sky. The circus had arrived that morning in rain, wagon wheels and beasts had ploughed up the soft turf into a slough of water-filled ruts and trampled mud. Huge grey clouds, rent and ragged, loaded with moisture, moved ponderously yet swiftly above tossing trees and agitated canvas. Yellow and russet leaves went whirling over the tops of dripping wagons and dark-stained tents; the increasing wind now roared through the valley, and wakened a medley of loud ominous sounds, creakings, whistlings, boomings and thuddings, from straining ropes, staggering poles and buffeted wallings.

Old Sam, shrouded in a black oilskin cape that increased his normally considerable girth to grotesque proportions, was stamping round the big-top, impatiently wrenching his wooden leg out of the mud at every step and bawling against the hullabaloo of wind and rain. Under his direction, all hands were busy rigging up extra stays, hammering down the stakes that the straining guy ropes tugged loose, replacing snapped ropes and straightening up the rocking quarter poles. The men were wet to the skin, rain streamed down their faces and squelched in their boots, and sweat soaked those parts of their body that the rain did not reach.

"Best pull down and pack up," shouted sallow-skinned Alfie Beckett, the cautious one of the family.

"Pull down?" bellowed old Sam. "Pack-up? Bloody Hell, what next? We'll show if I have a man hanging on to every pole. We'll show, I say!"

Alfy shrugged his broad shoulders. The wind drummed in the ear flaps of his sou'wester and whipped his long black hair

into his sombrely burning eyes. Alfy had a pain in his belly, he suffered towards the end of the season, what with continual hard work and continual lack of sleep. Also his knee was troubling him from an old fall. He had it bound up tightly, but none the less the knee cap kept slipping, and when this happened it was like a knife in the bone. "You know your own business, of course," he said, limping away, "but you best pack-up."

Luke led the drenched, excited horses to their quarters. The horse tent was crowded with animals tied head to head, the canvas flapped and lifted and the straw flew up. "We're in for a blow-down, see if we're not," said Walter Orde. "Hark to the Boss bawling wuss than fifty hurricanes! 'Ere, I'll rub 'em down, you be off and give a hand with the big-top. The Boss'll never learn sense till it's knocked into him by a falling king-pole. Who's coming to see a circus in weather like this, anyhow?"

Some came, some will always come, that was old Sam's experience. Those who have booked their seats will get their money's worth, and those children who have been dreaming of elephants and lions, of clowns and horses, ever since the bills went up, will venture even through an avalanche. Every penny taken is a penny to the good, wages and fodder bills do not diminish though the heavens empty themselves, once you're on the tober you pay for it, don't you, whether the show opens or not? Very well, then, open the show. Where would the Beckett family be to-day if they'd pulled down for every squall? In the workhouse, most like.

As the band banged out a martial air for the first act, and the big cats, snarling and grumbling, slunk single file down the runway and into the barred arena, Sam cast an experienced eye round the half-empty tent, reckoned up the numbers present and decided that it was not too bad. Beckett's had played to smaller houses and known worse weather, they had played when icicles hung from the dome and the metal of rings and bars burned with cold the hands that grasped them. Rain and wind? Pooh!

The rain was running down inside the wallings, though the roof held tight, the noise of the wind increased to gusts that clapped like thunder under the canvas dome and boomed along the wallings; the clown's jokes were swallowed up by its blasts, even old Sam's voice was heard only intermittently as, in his red

ring-master's coat and white gloves, he stumped about the ring, keeping his eye on those ominously floundering canvas walls, and sending urgent messages from time to time for yet another man to plunge into the rain and steady the dragging stays.

Outside, as daylight rapidly faded, pools gathered ankle deep, and among those pools, in the growing dusk, the performers with coats and cloaks flung over their scanty ring costumes, thick-booted and carrying their shoes under their coats, picked their way with scowls and hearty oaths against the Boss's pig-headed cussedness, scowls and oaths which were immediately transformed into bewitching smiles, as, having thrown off their coats and boots and hastily put on their pumps, they leaped, arm raised in friendly salutation, into the ring. In the ring each one behaved as if nothing unusual was happening, to look at their happy smiling faces you would think the hubbub and the roaring gale was all part of the show.

Even the suffering Alfy went through his daring trapeze act as if there was no such thing in life as a pain in the belly or a slipped kneecap. "Such a charming handsome fellow," you would have said had you been watching; "what magnificent shoulders, what elegant waist and hips! Gipsy type, no, Spanish perhaps—fit as a fiddle anyway. Devil-may-care, too, bet my bottom dollar he hasn't a worry in the world, that's what health does for a man, *he* doesn't know what it means to be off colour." But Alfy was sweating with the sickness in his belly, there was a mist before his eyes, and every time he hitched his right knee over the trapeze bar the pain was excruciating. And if he did not tumble headlong it was only because in his dazed, half conscious condition, use had made it more natural for him to catch and swing than to miss and fall.

When Alfy came down from the dome he raised his hand above his head, nodding and smiling, first towards the best seats, then towards the cheap seats. Now for the applause, give it boys, he deserves it, see how childishly pleased he is with our appreciation! Simple souls, but charming, these circus folk, how he laughs, what white teeth! Bravo, bravo, Signor Alfredo!

But as Alfy smiled and nodded the faces of the audience heaved like maggots before his eyes, and when he had bounded



out of the ring, he groped to the back entrance and fell down and was sick in the gusty darkness and torrential rain.

"Why don't the Boss call the show off," he groaned to the lashing wind.

"Ha! Ha! I'll call the show off in a moment!" shouted the wind.

Past the prostrate body of Alf, Salamander and Marguerita and the two greys, Pompadour and Paris, with blankets flapping on their backs and the plumes on their bowed heads drenched and bedraggled, were being led towards the back entrance by Walter Orde and Luke. Little Herman, muffled up in one of Frieda's waisted jackets, ran before them with a lantern. Little Herman reeled like a drunkard in the wind, Salamander plunged and protested, Marguerita shook her gentle head from side to side and whinnied, Pompadour reared, Paris let out a flying kick at him, the wide skirt of little Herman's jacket flew over his head, he pitched forward and rolled over and over like a winged bird, burning his arm on the smoking storm lantern.

"The devil's in the prads," shouted Walter Orde. "Why don't the Boss call the show off?"

Yes, indeed, why doesn't the Boss call the show off? Concealing their anxiety behind reassuring smiles, that was what all the artistes were asking. "It's daft, it's cracked, the big-top'll lift in a minute—How them folks can sit still in their seats—they won't in a moment—Crickey, look at them quarter poles! Is the Boss going to wait till there's a panic and in the anshum-scranshum for the door half of 'em's trampled to death?"

So they thought as they twirled and somersaulted, pirouetted and balanced, these smiling circus folk with never a care in the world——

But the spectators were getting alarmed, their eyes were on the wallings, now, more often than on the ring. Every one had been asked to retain half of his ticket. What did that mean? It meant that they would be given their money back if the tent fell in on them. But who wanted to wait until that happened? Look at those lamp brackets rocking in the wind overhead! Look at the sudden flaring and dwindling of the naked flames! Suppose the tent caught fire, what then? Would the rain put the fire out? Not in this wind, not with all this dry wood, these straw-stuffed

cushions, these flimsy draperies to feed the blaze. Not before they were all burnt alive. God! what a din the wind's making, boom, boom, like guns firing! And that was lightning, surely, flickering wanly over the top of the tent: thunder rattling, another and another flash (these circus folk, they aren't put about by anything—look at 'em smiling!). Shall we make a bolt for it? Deluging outside, best stay where we are. But suppose the tent's struck? Look at those poles rocking, the wind's lifting them clean off the ground, it isn't safe, it isn't really, there's one snapped over there, I heard it go. And what's that queer noise? An elephant trumpeting behind the curtains. I tell you I don't like it. Elephants run amok when it thunders, don't they? Those lions, too—Here, I'm off out of it, rain or no rain——

Lightning zigzagged over the tent, and as a louder clap of thunder echoed a man jumped down from his seat and ran for the entrance. Several women lifted down their frightened children and hurried after him, more people followed, they were all on their feet now, there was a rush for the crazily tilting entrance-way.

“Lad-ies *and* gentle-men, the show will pro-ceed ”

Standing in the middle of the ring old Sam raised his tremendous voice against the racket of the wind, the hammerlike pelting of the rain, the drum-like volleying of the tormented canvas.

“Lad-ies *and* gentle-men, the show—is—not—ended!”

But no one was listening to him. The crowd was jammed now in the entrance-way, women were shrieking, children howling, men shouting, they were fighting to get out and clear of the rocking, wind-twisted façade before it crashed down on them.

“Order, order, if you please! Barnaby, lead them elephants down the field! Order, order, pass out quietly, please! Tom, George, Matthew, Dolf, man the entrance! All hands lower the necks, clear the seating, pull down, pull down!” roared Sam.

Terrified women, screaming, wedged in the entrance way, felt themselves lifted by strong hands, whirled over the heads of the tightly packed crowd and dumped down in the mud and darkness. Men were held back by arms like steel bars, pushed forward, thumped on the shoulders, yelled at like driven cattle, children were snatched out underneath the wallings and tossed towards their distracted parents, whilst from inside the lurching and sway-

ing tent came the sounds of hammering, shouting, and the crashing down of wood and metal, sounds though loud and urgent yet half swallowed by the uproar of the rain and wind.

Behind the tent three men with lanterns were leading three huge, frightened beasts out from the back entrance. The elephants' ears were flapping, their little eyes rolling, they were all on-edge with nerves, but they felt better out in the open, and Barnaby, the one-armed elephant keeper, was bawling encouraging words to Moll, the leader, and most dependable beast of the three. Keep her from panicking and the other two would be all right. So, "Steady gal, steady, pick up your feet, left, right, faster, Moll, faster, here we go, quick march—run!" Give her an order, make her think she had something to do, keep her mind occupied, and old Moll would encounter the end of the world, without turning a hair.

At a swinging trot, old Moll and Barnaby set off across the field, and at a swinging trot, Daisy and Esmeralda followed. Daisy had old Moll's tail in her trunk and Esmeralda had Daisy's. Daisy and Esmeralda trusted old Moll, and old Moll trusted Barnaby. Theirs not to reason why, so long as they were doing something. "Keep 'em at it—round again!" yelled Barnaby over his shoulder as the lightning flashed and the thunder rattled and they reached the far end of the field and turned in orderly procession to trot along by the bottom hedge.

The light from three lurching lanterns wavered upwards across the huge, rain-darkened bodies, shadows like moving hills were gliding quickly along the hedge, lightning zigzagged above the trees to reveal undulating domed heads, swaying backs, and ponderously swinging legs. Away at the top of the field, where the spectators were splashing their way towards the gate, somebody raised an outcry. "The elephants! Look at the elephants! They're out-of-hand, they're running-amok!" There was a rush; screaming and shouting, stumbling and floundering, the crowd took fright again, there was a stampede for the gate, panting voices and pounding feet echoed up the road and died into the clamour of the gale as the crowd fled homewards.

Meanwhile every available woman on the show as well as every available man, was labouring at the pull-down. No time to be lost if the big-top was to be saved. Already the necks of

the canvas had been lowered to the bases of the king-poles, and the roof in the glare of the lightning assumed the shape of a gigantic saucer. But in the saucer the rain dragged heavily; several of the quarter-poles had snapped and there was a great rent down one side of the walling. The elephant tent, too tightly guyed, had torn in half, bell tents were blown to shreds; it was now completely dark, but as the red forked lightning split the darkness, pieces of canvas could be seen caracoling like live things across the fields. In the beast wagons the lions were roaring, leaping at the bars and pounding from end to end of their cages till the wagons rocked again; but the bars were strong, the wagons well strutted, nobody bothered about the lions. If the horse tent gave, there would be the devil to pay, the horses were already sweating with terror, they stamped on the sodden straw and splashed up the rivulets of water that flowed in under the writhing canvas. Walter Orde moved forward and backward among them, talking, soothing, scolding, caressing, nobody could be spared to help him, the entire company, with the exception of Walter Orde and the three elephant men, were out in the storm wrestling with the big-top.

Luke, half-blinded by rain, was struggling to dismember the façade. Alfie Beckett had been working with him, but Alfie had gone away to be sick again; Luke, left alone, seemed to be fighting with that façade as if with a crazy giant; its painted sections leaped and twisted, clattered and flapped, it was almost impossible to undo the bolts that held them together. The lamp brackets had been taken down, hurricane lamps and the intermittent lightning flashes lit up the shaking grotesquerie of the pictured tigers, horses, clowns and undulating serpents. In a rattle of wind a piece of the scalloped boarding cracked off and fell on Luke, to send him dazed and sprawling down into the mud. Somebody dragged the heavy board from him, a vehement voice shrilled in his ear, "Get up, you fool, here, give's yer hand!"

It was Anna. He saw her childish figure lit by lightning, the drenched curls blown up from her head, the rain flowing over her wide-winged nose into her red mouth. How strong she was as she dragged him to his feet, how possessed of urgent fury! "Hang on to this, unbolt that, lift, lift you jackass, don't dally

over them stays, cut 'em, cut 'em!" She was giving him orders as if she were forty and he fourteen, bawling at him continuously, he could see her wet red lips wide open in the lantern light and her eyes glittering as the rain ran over them. She was working too, lifting, dismembering, shifting, carrying, with a strength almost equal to his own. What a girl! Even in the frenzy of their labouring, Luke had time to feel amazed at her.

The façade was down, now; it lay heaped up in the mud, a crazy giant with the life beaten out of it by their joint efforts, a giant that still jerked and twisted spasmodically as the wind blew over it. What next? Luke was leaping to give a hand with the lowering of the king-poles when a violent gust caught Anna and sent her reeling against him. He put out an arm and held her. "Let me go! Get away!" she shrielled, striking him hysterically. Then, as he released her, she fell against him again and, to his astonishment, burst into passionate weeping. Both arms round her now he held her closely, protecting her against wind, rain, thunder—everything, as she clung to him, shaken with exhausted sobs, become suddenly so small, so tired, so utterly touching and childish.

"Help you to your wagon, shall I?" he bawled. Without waiting for an answer, he snatched up a lantern and, with his right arm about her, set off, head bent and floundering, through the storm. "A little girl, she's nort but a little girl," he found himself thinking, as his arm embraced the slender, sob-shaken body.

There was the wagon, with a wide pool of water in front of the steps, and the rain rattling on the skylights and pouring like an avalanche over the curved roof. They splashed ankle-deep through water and stumbled together up the quivering steps.

"All serene now?" shouted Luke.

Anna was no longer sobbing. She stood for a moment balanced against the door and looking at him with a grave dignity. "All serene, thank you," she answered. Then she wrenched the door open against the wind. "Good-night," she shouted, and darted inside.

"Good-night," shouted Luke as the door slammed shut.

Taking the steps in one jump, he landed with a splash that sent golden drops flying over his head. In the wide muddy pool a myriad flames leaped to the whirling of the lantern. Who now

felt like a giant—and no crazy one either? A giant of strength and sober tenderness glowing there in the hubbub of the storm with a pride of heart that made him unconscious of his drenched skin and his weary body? And all because he had helped a little girl across a field! No, not *a* little girl, *the* little girl—who once, long ago——

“And she don’t know, no more than the wind knows, who I am,” thought Luke, tilting his smiling face to the pelt of the rain. He groped his way back to the big-top, but there was nothing more to do. King-poles, quarter-poles, side-poles, tilting and wallings lay on the ground, an immense sprawling and shuddering heap of wood, canvas, metal, ropes and stakes waiting for the light of day to be sorted out. The storm was easing off, here and there stars gleamed uncertainly through rents in the heavily moving clouds, the roaring of the wind was less violent, the lightning flashes fewer and fainter, the thunder a sullen mutter moving steadily into distance beyond the town. Exhausted men and women were picking their way through the mud back to their wagons. Old Sam Beckett, lantern in hand, was setting off to make the round of his live stock, chuckling grimly as he went, and congratulating himself that for at least one show he had cheated the wind, and raked in a moderate day’s takings.

## V I

WHEN nights are long and mornings dark, when horses begin to cough and the old lion's eyes are thick with a head-cold, when men's tempers grow short and their curses loud, when jokes are few and frowns constant, when all the company are exhausted, and half the company are sick with rheumatic pains and cramps in the stomach, when, working as usual, they long for nothing but to drop down and sleep; when sleep itself becomes nerve-racked, haunted by nightmares of fire and falling poles, escaped lions and stampeding elephants, and all the hideous accidents that have ever befallen those who travel the roads; when the roads are rutted and slimy, and the fields are ploughed into quagmires, when heavy wagons going through the gateway sink to the axle-tree and stick, when slush-spattered horses jib in the traces, and time and again old Moll, blissfully gaitered in mud, must come to the rescue; when, day after day, a moving curtain of rain obscures the hills and trails across the valleys—when these things happen it is time for all circus folk, even the most undaunted, to seek their winter quarters. And old Sam himself, who believes in opening early and closing late, who reckons that pennies rolling in daily from March to November eventually roll themselves into a tidy bank balance, even Sam Beckett, that lion-hearted, indefatigable, comfort-scoffing, weather-defying old showman, has at last to admit that the season is ended.

And so, at the close of the night show on a wet Saturday in November, Sam Beckett stood in the middle of the ring and made a rousing speech, wished his audience good-bye until next season, thanked them for their patronage, and invited them to join with him in the singing of "Auld Lang Syne"; which they did with such gusto that old Sam was quite overcome, and remembering the countless occasions on which Mamma Beckett's husky voice had joined in that chorus, wiped his eyes with the back of a hairy fist as he stumped out of the ring.

That evening there was no pull-down. There was a carousal

for all artistes in the big-top with whisky and rum, ham and cold beef, slabs of cake and cauldrons of tea—a lavish carousal which, unfortunately, many of the company were too tired to thoroughly enjoy. And free bottles of beer and ham sandwiches were distributed to all hands.

On Sunday morning, at the unconstitutionally late hour of nine a.m., the pull-down was made, and the horse-lorries and wagons were packed for the last time that year. Then tent hands and bandsmen were paid off, each man receiving a bonus ("For it's been a damn' good season and we've done splendid," announced Sam Beckett). And so, after shaking hands with the Boss, these seasonal workers departed, footing it to the nearest railway station, carrying their wordly goods in gladstone bags, bundles, holdalls and brown paper parcels, and the bandsmen with their instruments slung across their shoulders.

To his satisfaction, but scarcely to his surprise—for it seemed to him a part of the foreordained sequence of events—Luke was not paid off. He was to go into winter quarters with the circus as under-groom. Walter Orde had requested it, and Alphonse too had seen to it that the Boss should not overlook his protégé. But indeed the Boss had needed no prompting, either from Walter Orde or Alphonse. No one who did Sam Beckett a good turn had ever been known to lose by it; moreover, from long training in a hard school, Sam Beckett was a nice judge of character.

"I've had me eye on Luke Ashbourne for weeks," said the Boss to Alphonse. "He's a good lad."

"He is more than that," answered Alphonse earnestly.

"May be," said the Boss. "I have your word for it. Anyhow I shall keep him."

Sam Beckett's winter residence was a sixteenth century farmhouse set on the side of a hill above a small village in Kent. For eight months of the year the farm was locked-up, its empty fields, shuttered windows and barred out-houses presenting a dreary, almost forbidding appearance to such few villagers as happened to stroll that way on Sunday afternoons. A lonely, inconvenient rambling old place, awkward to get at, and too far from the road; haunted too, so the villagers affirmed, by the ghost of a mad Elizabethan yeoman in a red skull-cap, who had been seen by many to glide in and out of the quickset hedge by



the farm gates. It had been empty for long enough before Sam Beckett took it over. But Sam was not afraid of ghosts; such a thing as loneliness did not exist for one who brought his world with him, and as for inconvenience—there was a shed large enough to house the elephants, a barn high enough to hang the tilting in, stabling in plenty, and a courtyard wide enough to accommodate all the wagons. What more conveniences did you require? Water laid on? Pshaw! Sanitation? Rot! Was the roof sound? Yes, it was. "Then I'll buy the place," said Sam, and named his price.

That was six years ago. Now, every autumn, like migrant birds, the growing tribe of Becketts, big and little, with all their train of horses, dogs, lions, and elephants, swarmed down on Gaythorne Farm. Up the hill from the village they came, wagonful after wagonful, down the lane, through the wideflung gates, over the fields and into the great weedy courtyard. The place, so long silent, echoed with their excited voices, with the stamp of hoofs, the clatter of wheels, the ring of harness, with neighing, trumpeting, roaring and barking. After months of silence, when the only sounds that broke the stillness were the songs of birds in spring, the voices and scythes of the mowers who came to save the hay at midsummer and the occasional whispering of a couple of lovers on warm evenings, now in the dead end and gloomy season of the year the place was vibrantly alive again.

Spurred on by the prospect of the leisure they had all been promising themselves, the company immediately set about the business of settling-in. The unwieldy sections of the big-top, together with the horse tent, elephant tent and smaller tents, were-lugged off to the tithe barn, unrolled and hung over beams. Poles and stays, the dismembered façade, the seating, the ring fence and the larger ring properties were deposited in the barn also; the harness was hung in the stable, the horses were turned loose into the fields; the grizzly was led into the empty pigs' house by Alphonse, the monkeys turned into the empty hen-house by Matthew Beckett. The elephants were backed on to plank beds well littered with straw in the big shed. The wild beast wagons were trundled into the orchard, their wheels crunching on fallen and wasp-bitten apples; and modest little Checko, the lion trainer, who bore the scars of thirty-nine wounds on his

body, set off with a horse and cart, accompanied by Herman and various small Becketts, to the knackers in the nearest market town to fetch up a week's supply of horse flesh.

At the back of the farm, in the wide courtyard, sheltered from the north and east winds by a plantation of larches, the living wagons were drawn up companionably close to one another, and the rusty old pump in the centre of the yard was set going by Luke, and worked till the muddy water flowed clear as crystal. Then the women came with their buckets and kettles and, having filled them, retired to wash and brush up, to take the curling pins out of their hair and put on clean blouses.

Meanwhile the house was thrown open, a fire kindled on the great open hearth in the kitchen, and mattresses and blankets for those who were to sleep indoors brought from the wagons and deposited on the old-fashioned iron bedsteads.

There were only four bedrooms at Gaythorne farm, but they were big ones, and they accommodated twelve of the Beckett family, old and young. The rest slept in their wagons, as also did the Lorraines and Checko. Luke, Walter Orde, and Moomoo, the old clown, had beds in the loft over the stable; the three elephant men slept in a corner of the elephant shed, where they had an iron cooking stove and a few pots and pans, and fended for themselves. Mrs. Lorraine cooked in her wagon, because Alphonse's queasy stomach demanded special un-English food. The rest of the company, including Luke and Walter Orde and Moomoo, ate in relays in the farm kitchen, first come, first served, with those who could not find room at the long table lounging against the walls, until someone should get up. Anna's mother, Roxy Beckett, who was now in her forties, still very comely but growing stout, did the cooking. The washing up was left to Luke and Walter Orde, the housework to any one who felt inclined to do it, which generally meant nobody. A fire blazed all day long in the big kitchen, and anybody was welcome to dry their muddy boots or their wet coats by it; there was food in plenty, there were beds and blankets for everybody, and chairs for those who were lucky. But as for housewifely order and "home comfort"—leave that to the flatties down in the village, the inhabitants of Gaythorne had no need of such things. Come to that, they didn't regard Gaythorne Farm as their home, it was merely their house,

a temporary shelter. Their real homes were their wagons—the wagons with the gay curtains, the painted ceilings, the polished metal work—and there they kept their treasured possessions, their pieces of coloured china and glass, their burnished kettles and brass ornaments, their photographs of circus stars in gilt and plush frames, their ornate mirrors and embroidered cloths. But the house, well, look at it! The house was a dumping ground for every superfluous and not immediately wanted article; those who slept in its four big bedrooms and those who slept in the wagons alike dumped lumber there. Every room was stacked with “properties,” bundles of curtains and draperies, pieces of coloured harness, belled collars, hoops and whips, old hats and head dresses of all descriptions, Mexican sombreros, Mongol helmets, Indian turbans, Persian kolas and Russian caps. Plumes, coiled lariats, guns, knives, tomahawks and musical instruments were hung about the walls; juggler’s balls and plates, broken wheels, gilded clubs and all manner of acrobatic paraphernalia lay heaped in corners. The chests in the bedrooms were crammed with cast-off ring costumes; the children dragged them out and dressed up in them and, when they were tired of play, left them lying. The women gathered them up and strewed them about once more, in the interest of trying on last year’s, or the year-before’s finery, pulling such finery to bits and fashioning new costumes from the pieces. The men wandered through the rooms, lifting down and fingering guitars and banjos, finding old treasures and devising new uses for them, pointing out how such-and-such would come in handy for so-and-so’s act in the ring next season; trying the stockman’s whips, fitting them with new thongs and carrying them into the yard, there to indulge in high-spirited cowboy antics. They took down the guns and, having cleaned and oiled them, went off over the fields to do some desultory shooting, and when they came back, Roxy Beckett stood in the doorway and shouted for Luke to come and skin the rabbits they had brought.

Shouting for Luke became a habit with all the Beckett family. The social gulf that existed between artistes and hands during the tenting season was, of necessity, somewhat broken down in the more intimate life at Gaythorne, where Luke had the freedom of the house and ate with the family. “Moppits” (for so they had

nicknamed him from the wild state of his hair on the day he joined the circus) was still a "hand," but he was now also an entity to each member of the Beckett family. They all liked him, there was something about him, he was capable and he was quiet and he was willing, he never sulked or lost his temper; and since he was so ready to serve them, they naturally shouted for him when they needed anything. Moreover, he had really nothing to do—had he? The horses were out to grass and the training for next season was not begun. What the Boss had brought Moppits along for the Beckett family couldn't, for the life of them, imagine; but since he had been brought along, he might as well make himself useful. So, if your buckets were empty, it was "Moppits, fetch us a turn of parni, will you, and look sharp." Or, if you had run out of your supply of tea or tobacco: "Say, Moppits, go down village a minute, old son." Or, if you felt like a ride: "Hey, Moppits, bring in two prads and saddle 'em." Or, if it was the kids' bath night: "Here, take the baby, Moppits, till I'm through with the others."

Moppits, as the women were not slow in finding out, had a way with babies. Instinctively he knew how to hold them, and what faces to pull in order to change their tears into gurgles of laughter, and the exact amount of force necessary—not too hard and not too soft—when you held them over your arm and smacked their little backs to bring up the wind; and if in the process they were sick over him, Moppits did not seem to mind. Yes, Moppits had a way with babies, and he had a way with horses, and, as Checko discovered when he took him one day into the beast cages, he had a way with lions.

"You are a real circus omei," said quiet-voiced Checko, and little guessed how Luke thrilled at the words.

"Can't think what you see in them cats," said Walter Orde, who resented Luke's interest in anything but horses. "Nasty spiteful devils, I calls 'em. And their breath—pah! You could cut it with a knife. Enough to make a man swoon! Give me a clean-feeding animal like a prad."

"They're alive, same as prads are," answered Luke.

That was it—the life in them. It made Luke feel warm: the life in the big cats, in the horses, in the dogs, the puppies, the elephants, the foals, the babies. He loved to touch life with

his hands, watch life with his eyes, smell life with his nostrils, hear the cries of life with his ears, draw in the consciousness of life with every breath he took. It was their life—the beasts'—and yet it was yours, too, and that was the miracle. You put your hand on a prad's neck and his life flowed through your fingertips, making you one; you held a baby in your arms and it was Life you held there; you stood by the beast wagons and watched the cats, and between you and them pulsations of life were coming and going, pulsations that were like innumerable drops of light, though you could not see them; only you were aware of them streaming even through the iron bars, streaming through the cats and through you and through everything that breathed on the face of the earth. On and on, round and round, into the body and out of the body and into the body again, went this stream of life, so that at times it was neither you nor the beasts that existed but just one thing, for which you and they were merely vessels filled and over-flowing, like drinking cups set round the basin of a never-failing fountain. Yes, that's how it was between you and the beasts.

Only, between you and your fellow men it was not always like that. Sometimes it was, and sometimes it wasn't. Sometimes for human beings (as ever at number 19 Camershaw Road) the hand of a dark demon shadowed the fountain. Then the fountain ceased to play, and the cups stood empty. What was it, this dark demon, that so maliciously stepped between man and man and dried up the life from the fountain? There was no name for it, but when it appeared it was death-in-life, and its presence was the reason why every living man felt lonely, felt insufficient, felt small and separate and unsure of himself.

Yes, even here, far away from the flatties and their works, even in this free, take-it-as-it-comes, live-for-to-day-and-never-heed-for-to-morrow existence, the shadow of the demon made itself felt. It was here now, standing darkly between Luke and Walter Orde, who were stretched out on their beds in the loft, luxuriating in an after-dinner siesta.

On the third bed, old Moomoo was sitting cross-legged with his back against the wall and with his head tied up in a blue cotton handkerchief (Moomoo was bald and he disliked draughts).

He was stitching canvas soles on to an out-size pair of comedy boots and singing to himself in a high, cracked voice.

“Roses are red  
Violets are *white*——”

“Alive,” growled Walter Orde. “’Course they’re alive, that’s why their breath stinks.”

There you were. That was the demon. Luke couldn’t understand why Walter Orde should object to his taking an interest in the big cats; neither could Walter Orde understand what Luke meant when he said, “They’re alive.”

A space of only two or three feet between them, and words travelling across the space. But no light. Each one, as it were, tied up in a black bag. That was the demon’s doing.

“I saw them on the bushes  
On Saturday night.”

sang old Moomoo.

“Moppits! *Moppits!* *MOPPITS!*”

A clear, imperative voice calling from the stable underneath. Anna’s voice. Luke rolled out of his blanket and picked up his coat from the floor.

“The kids don’t see the point of that joke, no more nor I see the eye of this ’ere darnation needle,” remarked Moomoo, holding the needle at arm’s length in an attempt to thread it. “And yet they allus laughs. What makes ’em laugh, then? I’ll tell ’ee.”

“*Moppits!*”

“Coming, Miss Anna,” called Luke, buttoning his jacket.

“They laughs because old Moomoo looks for ’em to laugh. When old Moomoo says laugh, they laughs, can’t help their-selves—But thread ain’t what it was, and needles ain’t what they was, and my eyes ain’t what they was.”

Luke left Moomoo licking the end of the waxed thread and chuckling, and Walter Orde staring at the rafters and frowning, and went down the ladder into the stable.

Anna was there in her ring tights, with a coat over her shoulders and wearing stout lace-up boots reaching nearly to her knees.

"Uncle Alf's going to learn me the flying trapeze," she began at once. "I'll learn you if you'll put up the doin's," he says. Then he lays down on the bed and snores, the pig. Because how can I put up the doin's by meself?"

"We'll soon have them up, if that's all," answered Luke. "I know how they go."

"So do I know how they go," said Anna quickly. "And I was up lots of times last winter on the mechanic. But no mechanic for me this time, thank you. Say, Moppits, I'm all of a twitter. Feel my heart beatin'?"

She took his hand in her own two and put it against her chest. Yes, he felt it, like a bird fluttering against bars. "That's because I want to learn so bad," explained Anna, as she let go his hand. "Hurry, Moppits!" She darted out of the stable, shouting as she went, "I want to learn, I want to learn that bad, I don't care if I break me neck."

"We'll put up the net for you," said Luke.

"Oh, the net! But I wouldn't care if I did break me neck. Do you feel like that, Moppits, do you ever?"

Her lips were smiling and her eyes so full and darkly burning that they made Luke think of the fire that old Moomoo told him flamed always under the surface of the earth. She didn't wait for him to answer, she was off at a swift run, round the grouped wagons in the yard, through the yard gate and along the muddy lane to the barn.

Luke followed. "She moves just like Juanita," he thought.

Juanita was a young tigress that the Boss had recently purchased, and which Checko was hoping to train for the ring. Sometimes, when Checko stood in front of Juanita's cage, spoke her name and hummed the luring call, she would rub her body along the bars, put down her head, roll on her back and purr, but sometimes she leapt from end to end of the cage, ears flat, tail threshing in a frenzy of rage. Always behind bars, poor Juanita! But Checko would "gentle" her, already he talked to her in her own language, shaping lips and throat into that strange luring call that she answered with a purr. . . . If Anna

were put behind bars, was there any luring call would gentle *her*? No, Luke couldn't imagine it. It would be claws, teeth, spitting, and a frenzy of wounded pride until she dropped. Pride! That was the difference between a beast and a girl.

He went into the barn and found Anna angry with him because he had not come more quickly; but her anger quickly fused into the energy with which she helped him drag out the complicated apparatus of the trapeze and carry it over to the high building next the elephant shed. This building had originally been the farm granary; Sam Beckett had converted it into a practising shed by removing the roof and capping the walls with a high, tent-shaped covering of corrugated iron supported on two king-poles. Between the walls and this new roof was a wide gap, and sometimes, on bitter winter days, performers, shivering in their ring costumes, would demand of the Boss why the hell he couldn't have made a better job of the place whilst he was about it. But the Boss maintained that it was good enough. What did they expect—a palace? Were they gajos, or duffs, or what were they, that they couldn't put up with a little fresh air?

In this practising shed, then, Luke and Anna assembled the platforms, the bars, ropes, poles, ladders and net. Luke thought that the trapeze should be fittel up fairly near the ground for a start, but Anna said, no, high, high, high as it would go.

"Haven't you sense to know you must begin as you mean to go on?" she asked austerely. And Luke admitted that she was right.

How she bossed him! Since that night when he had helped her through the storm to her wagon, Anna seemed to regard Moppits as her especial property, and whatever she wanted done, he must do. Whether she was ashamed of the tears she had shed and felt it necessary, for her self-esteem, to tyrannise over the one who had witnessed them, or whether, since he had helped her once with such ready sympathy, she now as a matter of course looked for his sympathy and help on all occasions; or whether unconsciously she sensed his admiration and, with that wily feminine instinct that works below the surface of even the most unsophisticated of her sex, had decided to put his admiration to a practical use: whatever the cause, the result was the same.



The remoteness that had previously existed between them had changed since that night of the storm into a warm and good-humoured intimacy, in which each one consistently played an allotted part. She was his gracious, if somewhat exacting queen, he her willing slave—a slave so devoted that he was amusedly ready to go through fire and water at one nod of the little, proudly-poised, curl-papered head.

It was not what folk called "love" that he felt for her. Luke was certain of that. She was a child; moreover—was he not pledged to Elsie? If you were Luke Castle you didn't get engaged to one girl and fall in love with another. No, no, most certainly it was nothing like that. Had Luke been better educated, he might have defined his emotion for Anna as a chivalrous one, the attitude of a knight to his lady, an intensely personal devotion, yet one with no ulterior motive and looking for no ultimate reward, save that of continuing to serve. As it was he must do without a definition, and content himself with the happy feeling of tenderness, the proud realization of his own strength, and the gentle instinct of protectiveness that the thought of her evoked in him.

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## V I I

WHEN the trapeze was in position Anna went to summon Alfy. He came yawning and grumbling—November month was but barely half-over, surely a man might look for a few weeks' rest before beginning to train for next season. But no sooner was he stripped and ready than his yawns and his grumbles vanished. He became brisk, alert, exacting, strung to a pitch of nervous tension that brooked no last moment qualms or hanging back on Anna's part.

"Now then," said Alfy, "up we get. You know how it's done, well enough. Wait for 'go,' then three swings and off. And Moppits must come up too, and swing your bar for the return."

Anna was rubbing rosin on to her thin palms. Her eyes looked very big and bright, and Luke, watching closely, could see the pulses beating in her neck. "That's because I want to learn so bad!" Yes, he knew that mood, the excitement, the rapid beating of the heart that, as soon as she began to work, would give place to such intent absorption that all consciousness of self and body would be forgotten. Yes, as though she were himself, Luke understood what Anna was feeling.

Alfy went up the rope ladder like a cat and Anna immediately followed him. Mellow light from the afternoon sun filtered in through the gap between the roof and the walls of the shed, so that Luke, looking up, saw the trapeze bars and the yellow-painted platforms illumined as if by the lights of the big-top, saw also, as he followed them up, the two figures in their flesh-coloured tights, the muscular figure of Alfy and the slender figure of young Anna, climbing from shadow into light.

Now in the "cradle" under the roof Alfy hung upside down by his hocks, and some forty feet from him Anna stood in front of Luke on the platform gripping the bar of her trapeze. "Go!" called Alfy. Anna threw herself forward, three swings and she released her bar in mid-air and, with hands outstretched, shot

across the intervening space towards the hanging Alfy, who caught her by the wrists. Luke, leaning forward, caught the bar of Anna's trapeze as it swung towards him and swung it again at a shout from Alfy. Anna was flying back now, Luke saw her body twist in the air and her hands, with fingers spread, held out to grasp the bar which he had swung. The fingers just touched the bar, fumbled, slipped, the bar swung back towards Luke, and Anna went plunging downwards into the net.

"Keep your legs together—lift 'em out stiff—turn, turn!" yelled Alfy all in one breath, as Anna fell, but Anna went skating along the length of the net on her face. "Clumsy little cow, you might have broke your neck, haven't you sense enough to fall on your back?" scolded Alfy, as Anna floundered to her feet with the net rocking and sagging under her. She was up the ladder again in a trice. Luke offered her a handkerchief to wipe the blood from her face, and she slapped his hand for him.

Next time she started swinging before the word "Go!" Alfy caught her, but by one wrist only, and again she was scolded. On the return she landed safely; between the smeared blood of numerous scratches her face showed white as her curling rags.

Over and over again, not to be beaten by blood or falls or Alfy's scoldings. No sooner could she perform the swing dexterously than Alfy must have her execute a somersault in mid-air, no sooner could she execute the somersault than she must essay a double, but, when she had fallen into the net for the fourth time, the breath left her body and she lay winded. That ended the practice for that day. When she recovered her breath she was so angry that she wouldn't look at Luke, but went out of the shed without speaking a word.

"She've got the devil of a temper, that kid have," remarked Alfy, as he put on his coat and trousers, "but she'll do it good in time."

After Alfy had gone away, Luke stood in the shed, thinking. Here he was nearly seventeen, and nothing yet accomplished. Life at Gaythorne was pleasant enough—but what about Castelli's Circus? "Loplolly and under-groom!" he said to himself derisively. No, not another day would he remain merely that. What was to stop him practising? Nothing. Nobody. There was an hour before six o'clock, tea-time. The shed door opened in-

ward, there was a lock but no key; he propped an iron bar under the lock and flung off his boots, coat and trousers.

For an hour he worked hard; the sunlight vanished from under the roof, and trapeze bars and spring-boards hung ghostly in shadows. On the floor of the barn, where Luke was somersaulting and tumbling, it was almost dark. He sweated and his limbs felt stiff and awkward; he was not near so good now as when he and Scory took Whitfield pantomime audiences by storm. No, not near so good, but with each essay improving a little, getting the hang of it again. Mustn't be late for tea, or they'd come out shouting for him. At six o'clock he dressed quickly and took away the prop from the door. To-morrow he would rig up that wire he had seen in the barn, a tight-wire was dandier than a tight-rope, and if you could work the one you could work the other, and, maybe, that would be a new act for Beckett's next season. . . .

A fortnight later, Anna, who had done her trapeze practice in the morning, came through the yard and round the out-buildings looking for Moppits. Where was he? Not in the loft, she had been there. Not in the house, not in the fields, not down the village, for she had asked everybody, and nobody had sent him on an errand. She wanted to go riding and her stirrup leather was broken. Of course, Walter Orde would mend it, but then, she wanted Moppits to do it. Moppits *ought* to be within call when she needed him, but this afternoon her slave seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth. . . . Not in the barn—Anna peeped in there. In the elephant shed perhaps, having a palarie with Barnaby? No, Barnaby hadn't seen him. Barnaby was about to take the three elephants out for a stroll. Old Moll was unchained, she came ambling towards the open doors of the shed, her trunk held out suggestively to Anna. Old Moll put the tip of her trunk into Anna's hand and blew a warm, wet breath into it. "Haven't you so much as a peppermint for me?" she said. Anna patted the dejected trunk and went out. Old Moll stood rocking from one foot to the other and meditating on the disappointments of life.

Moppits couldn't be in the practice shed, because the door was shut; it wouldn't open, either, when Anna pushed it. That was funny! Anna rapped on the door. "Any one in there?"

she called. No answer. She walked away and went round to the orchard to see if Moppits was maybe amusing himself in his odd manner by gazing at the lions. He wasn't there, she thought he wouldn't be, she'd been before. Only Checko was there.

Checko was sitting on a stool in Juanita's cage, and Juanita was sitting with her back against the wooden partition of the cage, glaring at him. Not taking his eyes off Juanita, Checko made a tiny sign to Anna, the merest lifting of a finger. "Don't speak, don't move," the sign said. Across his knees was a long pole with a brush of stiff twigs at the end of it.

"Ju-an-i-ta," Checko's voice was very gentle and persuasive.

Juanita stood up. No, she had decided she didn't like Checko. Her tail switched, her ears went flat, her gums bared. "Ru-awh, ru-awh! Get out or it will be the worse for you," she said.

Checko didn't move. "Ju-an-i-ta!" he repeated softly.

Suddenly Juanita sprang, and with an agility equal to her own, Checko was on his feet. The long pole barred Juanita's way, it was the pole, not the man, that she found herself attacking. Up on her hind legs she clawed it, worrying the brush with her teeth. "Ru-awh!" Juanita shook the brush. "Ru-awh!" A silly thing, this brush, no taste to it, Juanita dropped on all fours and stared at Checko; she was not so very angry after all.

But what was this? Checko was stroking her back with the brush, and ripples of pleasure were running up Juanita's spine. Involuntarily her back sagged and swayed to the movement of the lead-weighted pole. Do it again, do it again and again, Checko! Slowly Juanita's young, lanky haunches lowered under the pleasant sensation; her heavy head rubbed the floor, she rolled over and purred with delight. Checko looked up and smiled at Anna. Anna who had kept still as a stone, lest she startle Juanita into a sudden savagery which might cost Checko his life, waved a hand and went out of the orchard.

The sky was dark with clouds, the whole earth looked dreary and it was beginning to rain a little. Perhaps Anna wouldn't go riding after all. Perhaps she would go into the farm kitchen and have a romp with the children. (But, nevertheless, when she saw Moppits again she would give him a piece of her mind.) Or perhaps she would go into the practice shed and work the trapeze on her own. There were things she could do without a

catcher. Funny about that door being fast! Was it possible someone was inside? "A mystery!" thought Anna gleefully, remembering a drama called *The Murder in the Red Barn*, that she had once seen at a penny gaff. Almost made you want to be an actress that play did, to be dragged round the stage by your hair, and shot at and strangled and stabbed.

The impatient feeling occasioned by the dullness of the day and the annoyance of not finding Moppits, became tinged, now, with colour and excitement. With exaggeratedly stealthy footsteps Anna walked back towards the practice shed. She was Maria Martin, now, stealing out at night to be murdered by her lover. "Richard Cawdor! Richard Cawdor!" Anna rolled her eyes heavenward and clasped her hands over her heart. Yes, it would be all right to be an actress, though it didn't take much doing, really, and so perhaps, was not particularly worth while. You couldn't break your neck, being an actress. But it was fine fun. "Richard Cawdor!" Anna breathed a maidenly sigh as she came in sight of the big closed door of the shed. "Are you in there waiting for mah, Richard Cawdor?" Noiselessly she tiptoed and put an ear against the door. But what, in heaven's name was this? There *was* someone inside! Someone, or something. Creak-creak, creak-creak—the sound of a swing, or a trapeze bar, or rings, rhythmically moving. Sakes alive! Real mystery, not a pretence one! Anna went round to the end of the shed where there was an outside flight of stone steps leading to a small door half-way up the wall.

The door was rotted in places, and there were gaps in the pulpy wood on the edges of the upright boards. Anna stooped and pressed her face against the largest of these gaps. The next minute she was flying back to the yard, jumping and clapping her hands as she went.

Old Sam Beckett was dozing in his wagon. He liked to go there of an afternoon for a "lay down." It was so peaceable. Give Sam a wagon before a house, any day, and a bunk before a bed. He only slept in the house at night because, as Boss, it wouldn't look well if he relegated the best bedroom to somebody else. But it was a gaunt and cheerless place to kip in, that bedroom. It held no good memories and no warm associations. Whereas in the wagon it seemed to old Sam that Mamma Beckett

sometimes came and lay down beside him. He was dreaming of her now; they were young and it was springtime and they were on the road, sitting side by side in the front of the wagon as the horses plodded forward. "Whey-hey there!" Sam had seen some violets in the hedge, and he pulled up the horses that he might pluck these violets for Mamma. Then she began to shake him. What was it? Didn't she want the violets? Sam opened his eyes and saw his grand-daughter, Anna.

"Gran'pa, come quick, you old vagabond! I've suthing to show yer."

Sam blinked at the eager face, surrounded by the thick blobs of darkly tawny hair. (The curling rags had been taken out early to-day, because Anna had intended to go riding.)

"Eh Lor'." Sam didn't want to be shown anything, he wanted to go on dreaming. "'S 't tea time?" he mumbled.

"Tea-time!" Anna seized him by the shoulder and jerked him upright. Her slim child's arm had more energy and strength in it than many a young man's. "Won't be there tea time, won't be there long, maybe won't be there now."

"Then dang it——"

"Oh, come, *come* I say!" Anna stamped. Sam Beckett got down from the bunk. There was one person, certainly, who could lead this old lion of a Boss by one ear, and that person was Anna.

She hustled him into his coat and crammed his bowler hat on to his bald curly-fringed head.

"Quietly, quietly," she cautioned him, as he stumped after her along the cart track to the practice shed. "Walk on the grass, keep Mo'gany Joe from clattering."

"Mo'gany Joe" (or Joseph) was the name given by old Sam to his wooden leg.

"What's the game?"

"Sh!" She put up a finger to her lips and whispered.

"Don't make any noise. You'll see. Up the steps!"

Dang it all! Mo'gany Joseph didn't appreciate the steep crumbled-away steps. There was a step missing and Mo'gany Joseph had to hop for it. Hop and make no noise? What next? For no one in the world but Anna would Sam and Mo'gany Joe

have entered into such a prank. But for some reason they always did what Anna told them.

By the time he had coaxed Mo'gany Joseph to the top of the steps Sam was puffing and blowing. "Old Zoty that I am," he thought with amusement. Anna stooped and peeped through one of the gaps in the door; still peeping, she excitedly beckoned him to look. Hey, what was this? Someone in there loving? Let old Sam catch 'em, that was all! Tenting or wintering, Sam put up with no irregularities of behaviour among his dependents. With a vigorous gesture he pushed Anna out of his way, stooped and put his eye to the gap. Then he began to chuckle softly.

Well, well, well, so that was what Alphonse had meant. 'Well, well! Old Sam's sides were shaking with silent and appreciative laughter. Anna, pressed against him, had her eyes to another gap. "Working tidy, ain't he?" she whispered. "O-oh, see that, gran'pal!"

Down below them in the shed, Luke, in his vest and pants, was performing with considerable skill on the low-wire he had set up. He was facing them, but his eyes were trancelike and unseeing; he was executing a dance, a kind of waltz, which he had invented. The tune of the Blue Danube sounded through his brain, and in perfect time he swayed and postured. He was in the circus ring, far away from Gaythorne, he was clothed not in vest, pants and socks but in satin shirt, embroidered knee breeches, silk hose and golden pumps. Drums and trumpets, cymbals and flutes beat out the tune of the Blue Danube that sounded through his brain, and all round the ring he was conscious of pinky white faces turned towards him, of hundreds and hundreds of eyes fixed upon his swaying figure. He did not see them, he saw nothing, but they saw him.

There goes the applause, now, beginning low, heightening till it crashes like the waves upon a stony beach all round the big-top. You are aware of it, though you do not hear it, you hear only the tune to which your body sways.

"Hey! Good people! Hey! I, Lucio Castelli, salute you!" Luke finished his dance with a somersault, landed on the wire, swayed there for an instant on the balls of his feet, then leaped from wire to floor and, with head flung back and face radiant, lifted both hands in salutation to an imaginary audience.



"Bravo, bravo, good, good, *good!*" called Anna, banging on the rotten door. And "Bravo, bravo!" roared old Sam with his mouth to the gap.

Luke started, gasped, glanced upward quickly, then down at the ground. His exultant spirit shrivelled within him. What a fool he felt, standing there in a sweaty vest and ragged pants, and with his holey socks bound round and round with string to prevent them from slipping! They were laughing at him too, he could hear Anna's clear ha! ha! ha! ha! from behind that beastly little door and the Boss' rumbling bass. Oh damn and blast and beggar it! Feet were racing down the steps and along the length of the shed. Anna was beating on the big door now. "Let me in," she called. "Open the door, Moppits, let me in *at once!*"

Slowly Luke moved to the door and pulled away the iron strut. Anna swirled in. Laughing she flung herself upon him and kissed him on both cheeks. Then, as if suddenly mindful of her dignity, she pushed him away and began to scold. "You bad pig, you. I was looking for you everywhere to mend my stirrup leather!"

Old Sam, sounding an imperious tattoo with Mo'gany Joe, stumped into the shed. He, too, seemed to feel that he had been betrayed into an over-noisy enthusiasm. After all the Boss is the Boss, and don't you dare to forget it, young feller! Sam's deep-set eyes were humorous, but his lips were not even smiling. "Best get your coat on, lad," he said, "you're all of a sweat."

Without saying a word, Luke dressed himself. A returning sense of triumph, over-riding his discomfiture, enabled him to behave with dignity. Because, however foolish he might now feel, his performance had been creditable, he knew it had, they could not have been laughing at that, only at the guy he looked in his torn pants. Moreover—Anna had kissed him. . . .

"Where did you learn them tricks?" asked old Sam, as they left the shed.

"At home, sir, I—I practised. I worked in panto once."

"Um. What else can you do?"

"Perch act, sir."

"Um. Can you ride?"

"Why. Of course, sir."

Sam gave an impatient exclamation. "I mean trick ridin'."

"No, sir. That is, I used to be able to do knees up, and skip a bit."

"Nort else?"

"No, sir."

"That don't carry you far. Well, lad, get in the shed when you can, and keep at it. And if you want a prad to work, any time, try the Knapstroper—he's steady. By God, December already, is it? And no one doing nothing!"

Old Sam stumped off. He would read the riot act, this very day, to his lazy family. What would they be when they started tenting again, if this sort of thing went on? A stiff-jointed, good-for-nothing lot of hobos, that's what they'd be. This Moppits put them all to shame. Aye, a good lad, a very good all-round lad. Well-mannered, too, and modest. Old Sam would have a use for him next season.

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## VIII

NEXT day old Sam had most of his family at work in the practice shed. "Never be content with what you can do, but go one better," he reminded them. He also repeated his favourite maxim: "Them as don't go for'ward goes back"; a maxim they were all by now heartily weary of, so often had he dinned it into their ears from childhood onwards. However, the Boss was Boss on Beckett's, no doubt about it, and when the old tyrant said "do this," you swore, but you obeyed. So on the morning after old Sam had vigorously made it known to his sons and daughters, and to his sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, that the winter was passing and that they had played long enough, sixteen out of eighteen clothed themselves in suitable attire and went in relays to the practice shed. Only Sam's daughter, Euphemia, and his daughter-in-law, Hester, begged to be excused, because they were "expecting."

So, in the practice shed, Alf, Matthew, Flora, Julia, Dolf and Cyrus went through their spring-board and tumbling act, and were roared at by old Sam to put more ginger into their work, or they need expect no wages from him next season. And Sarah and Helena did their "Strong Girl Hand Balance" act, and old Sam regarded the buxum curves of their bodies with asperity, and remarked that muscles were one thing and flabby fat quite another, and that sit, sit, sit, and gossip, gossip, gossip all day long in their wagons wouldn't help to balance no bars, nor yet to lift no weights. And Edwina and Ella and Roxana and Tommy rehearsed the rings and the low trapeze and Sam said, what! had they worked all these years and couldn't sell their acts yet, they looked dowdy and they moved like dolls, he said, and they must set to and make themselves some slap-up and fetching costumes, blue and gold and matching in every particular. Then came the clowns, Jack and Norman and Moomoo and little Herman, and Sam said they must tumble flatter and speak nimbler and leap higher and act sillier, and have some

new gags ready by to-morrow, and were they clothes props or pokers, or what, that their faces were so stiff?

So it went on. Old Sam hadn't a word of praise for anybody. When he was satisfied, he bawled out, "That'll do—Next!" And when they were all worn out he told them they must work brisker next day. "Because if you're satisfied, I'm not," he shouted as he stamped out of the shed. Arduous days of it, the old tyrant gave them, days in which muscles hardened again, and the complacency which had begun to soften handsome faces was replaced once more by an alertness of eye, a compression of lip, and a certain hawklike intensity of feature which old Sam regarded as the hall-mark of the Beckett family and of all first-rate artistes. Only to little Checko the new régime made no difference, for he had never stopped working, and old Sam knew better than to interfere with him. From year's end to year's end, Checko lived with and for his cats; human beings meant very little to him, though he was ever kindly and courteous. All through the winter he scarcely moved outside the orchard where his small living-wagon was drawn up close to old Cæsar's cage.

A quiet-voiced, smiling, black-eyed little fellow of few words was Checko. Nobody knew much about him except that he hailed from Czechoslovakia, that his mother had been killed by a leopard when he was an infant, and that his real name was quite unpronounceable.

In the field in front of the farm-house, Sam marked out a ring, and into this ring on every fine afternoon the horses were now brought for practice. There were four young horses and two young ponies ready to be broken. There were also three grandchildren, Bella and Susannah and little Henry who, having attained the mature ages of five, six and seven, must be got on to horse-back immediately if they were ever to make riders. So each child in turn was buckled into the 'mechanic' (a leather belt suspended from a swivel attached to a pole in the middle of the ring) and each child in turn was lifted up on to the back of Dainty, an honest and accomplished and altogether reliable pony, and Dainty was set trotting round the ring. And first the child would be standing proudly upright on Dainty's back, and then it would be kicking wildly aslant on her croup, and then it would be dangling forlornly at the end of the mechanic several paces behind.

And old Sam bawled at them and called them duffs and yobs, and they showed their tempers at him like true blooded little Beckett's. Five-year-old Henry used shocking language, and seven-year-old Bella announced that she didn't give a damn for the old man, and six-year-old Susannah demanded shrilly who the hell he reckoned he was shoutin' at, and she shouted back until she nearly shouted herself into hysterics. But they made good progress, all three of them, because they all three wanted to "ride good" more than they wanted anything else on earth, and after every practice old Sam took them into his wagon and gave them each a gingerbread out of a green tin with red horses painted on it.

The young horses and ponies got lumps of sugar and no shouting, because young horses and ponies, as Sam instinctively understood, lacked the stimulus of ambition, and therefore required more considerate treatment. Also they couldn't shout back at him, which placed them in a different and inferior category. They had vanity, of course, but that came in later, when they knew themselves for artistes, when, with plumed heads and coloured trappings, they performed under the lights of the big-top, and heard the music and the clapping of hands. Until that time came they must be coaxed and humoured. No, no, a sensible man, however great the provocation, did not shout at an animal.

For this self-imposed curb on his natural instincts, old Sam made up by shouting at his fools of sons, whom, together with Walter Orde and Luke, he stationed at spaced intervals outside the ring to prevent the excited young horses from making a bolt for freedom. In the centre of the ring stood old Sam, cracking his long whip, and round and round the ring, and round and round again, went the four young horses and the two young ponies with the gentle Marguerita at their head to make them understand what was required of them: a wheel of horses continually turning, with old Sam as the hub revolving on his one sound and his one wooden leg till the very sight of him would have made a spectator giddy.

To keep inside the ring was the first and most difficult lesson the young animals had to learn; once they had mastered that lesson to perfection all the rest would follow naturally. "Ho! ho! ho! Ah brah've, ah brah've! Brah've Beauty, brah've

Pearl, brah've Magpie, brah've Castor, brah've Pollux, brah've little Melusine! Ho! ho! ho! Brah've my fine fellows!" Sam's honeyed and caressing voice issued from the axis of the wheel, and round the circumference spun the soft pad, pad, of hoofs on the grass and the resonant sound made by the moving bodies that seemed to Luke like the reverberant beating of a great bird's wings.

Round and round, cool and demure and somewhat bored, trotted the creamy-coated Marguerita, and round and round behind her, with tossing heads, wild eyes, distended nostrils and sweating bodies followed the excited novices. Every now and then a horse or pony would fling up its heels and attempt to leap the ring fence, to be headed back by the waving arms and interposed bodies of Sam's sons and dependants. But, sometimes, kicking and bucking, the young animal, outmanœuvring those gesticulating arms and agile bodies, would burst like a bomb through their midst and gallop away down the field. Then, whilst the wheel of horses broke into confusion, whilst some men leaped into the ring to circumvent stampede by hurling themselves upon hot arched necks and agitated muzzles, whilst others pelted across the field after the runaway, whilst Marguerita, serene amid the surrounding turmoil of neighing, plunging, rearing and kicking, bent her graceful head to lip the turf, then old Sam's wooing accents would change into such a roar of furious protest as surely must have re-echoed against the walls of heaven, and the curses he called down upon his sons and dependants were enough to make a listening angel clap his wings over his ears in decent shame.

They were used to it. It was the way of the Boss; it meant nothing, it dwindled to a growling and muttered grumble, to a snort of disdain and a contemptuous oath or two immediately the fugitive was brought back into the ring. Then, after an offering of sugar all round to soothe frayed nerves and restore confidence, the long whip would crack once more, and the caressing voice begin again, and it would be ho! ho! ho! and ah brah've, ah brah've, and the wheel spinning and old Sam revolving at its centre on his one sound and his one wooden leg. And so it went on, day after day, until a day came when Beauty, Pearl, Magpie, Castor, Pollux and little Melusine followed Mar-

guerita coolly and at an even trot, with no sudden bewildered halts and no sudden bewildered rushes—and as for attempting to leap the ring fence, why, they would have as soon attempted to leap the moon. And thus the first, and most difficult lesson was mastered.

After that came the "pirouette." Patiently Marguerita trotted round the ring and energetically Beauty, Pearl, Magpie, Castor, Pollux and little Melusine followed, rather hot with excitement again for this was something new, each back bore the unaccustomed weight of a rider. "Pir-ou-wit" came Sam's voice as he turned with a waltzing movement in the centre of the ring. Obediently Marguerita paused in her trot, turned a complete circle with an elegant waltzing movement, and trotted on again; and willy-nilly, with jerks and curvets, sidelong caracoling and astonished protests, each novice followed her example, for each had received from its rider a sudden smack on the side of its neck that started it spinning. Time after time, hour after hour, day after day, until, at the word "pir-ou-wit" every novice, freed of its rider, turned with as much certainty and graceful precision as Marguerita herself. And so, through trick after trick . . .

"That's how it's done," Luke would say to himself. "Aye, that's the way of it."

For Luke, like the young horses, was learning at these performances, though his lesson was not theirs. Luke was learning the art of the trainer. As he watched old Sam's every gesture, memorized his every word, and noted his infinite patience, Luke, in imagination, was training white arabs and slim Trakehners for Castelli's Circus. Where these dream-animals were to come from, how they were to be purchased, or in what far-off glitter of lights they were to perform, Luke had no idea. But he had no doubt that he would one day possess them; it was ordained so. Page by page, the book that was the destiny of Luke Castle unfolded itself, and had he not, with some mysterious part of himself that knew all things, long ago read that story to the end? In the meantime there was patience—infinite patience that accomplished all things, unflinching endeavour, unswerving loyalty, and page by page the unfolding of the book.

Throughout the day, what with the training of the horses,

going errands and dancing attendance on one or other member of the family in the practice shed, Luke had little leisure. But every evening he took a hurricane lamp and went alone to the practice shed where he shut himself in and worked hard to perfect himself on the low-wire. And every fine morning, before breakfast, he went into the fields, caught Damson and worked hard to perfect himself as a rider.

"What's the big idea?" asked Walter Orde. "You're workin' yourself to a shadder."

"I want to get on," answered Luke doggedly.

"Get on?" sneered Walter Orde. "Where to? Into your grave with a broken back! There's many a man works hisself to a shadder and reaches no further'n that. A man's workin' of hisself is like throwing a stone into the air what comes down in the same place. Aye, and in a lower place, if lower there be. Look at me! I worked I tell yer, and I fell, and where am I now? Far better you stepped down to the bevy of a night-time and enjoyed your pint along of me. When a man's in beer it don't signify whether he fell or whether he didn't. We're too sober on this joint, all of us, and that's what wrong. The old Rum-Cul thinks he can keep the beer to hisself. Well he can't. Practice what you preach, I says, you durn old hypocrite."

"Shut up," said Luke sharply. "Talk sense, or I'll sock you one!"

"Oh, all right, kid, all right," grumbled Walter Orde, "I ain't complainin'. Only you don't find me workin' meself to a shadder whilst other folk lords it at their ease, that's all I'm telling yer."

This remark of Walter Orde's referred to old Sam's custom of riding down to the village on winter evenings to spend a quiet hour or two at the King's Head. Old Sam considered that he had arrived at that time of life when such a relaxation was permitted him. It "took his mind off things," as he expressed it to himself, it made him forget that when he had bought Gaythorne he had pictured Mamma Beckett installed in the big kitchen as queen of the first house she had ever inhabited. And exactly five days after entering that house she had died. So what was a house, after all? Nothing. Just a larger and draughtier wagon, with too much space in it and too little homely



warmth; so that a hale and hearty body, who had lived without sickness for years enough sheltered by the cosy and familiar walls of her narrow home, like an animal in its lair, upon moving into this larger and draughtier wagon takes a chill and dies and all in the bewilderingly short time of five days. . . . It was a relief to get shot of it, and of all responsibility, and to sit and meditate with your pint pot in front of you in your accustomed corner down at the King's Head. Sam took the same seat, the corner of the settle by the fire, every evening. If the seat was not vacant the moment he stumped into the bar, it was the moment after, for the old fellow had a way with him that singled him out as boss in any company. "Good evening all," old Sam would say, and if there was one sitting in the corner of the settle by the fire, that one would immediately rise. Then Sam would take his place and order his beer, and, drinking it slowly, would fall into a deep and silent cogitation from which no man dared to rouse him until he chose to rouse himself. Then it would be "good-night all," and out of the bar and round to the stable, there to mount the unsaddled stallion Punch, faithfulest of retainers (he had carried Sam on his back for twenty years and whether Sam had one leg or two made no difference to Punch), and so up the hill and back through the night to Gaythorne at a dignified walk which suited Punch's mellowing age and old Sam's meditative humour.

It was perhaps this meditative humour that most annoyed Walter Orde when he met his boss in the bar of the King's Head. As Walter Orde remarked "a chap don't like to be hignored like he was a post or a table leg." And Walter's boss when he came to the King's Head seemed to take silence for his cloak and spirit himself away in it. Or perhaps it was the fact that Walter Orde, though he might console himself for fate's scurvy treatment of him by a nightly pint or two, must, however deeply sunk in reverie the Boss might appear to be, at all times keep that nightly consolation within reasonable limits. "Stay sober or quit," that was the decree of the Boss, and it applied equally to members of his family and to paid hands. Apart from Sam and Walter Orde, they seldom, any of them, "stepped down to the bevy of a night-time." Why should they? Life was never dull at Gaythorne, and, moreover, artistes that take to drinking bring about that very fall that Walter Orde so frequently deplored. The evenings at Gay-

thorne were spent in playing cards or dominoes, or shove half-penny, or in furbishing up ring costumes, or in teaching one another new conjuring tricks or sleight-of-hand, or in performing amazing step-dances to the strains of an accordion or a mouth-organ.

Sometimes there would be a clatter of hoofs out in the courtyard, and a knocking at the door so loud that it was heard above the merriment within; and there, in the starlight, thick-coated against the sharp winter weather, would be a visitor, or maybe, two, three, four, five, or six visitors, circus pals who had been working in London, or who were without jobs and so, well—"Hallo! How are yer, Sal, or Dick, or May, or Ned! Well I never! Fancy seein' *you*! Come in! Come right in! Stoppin' for a bit of course? Oh yes, plenty of beds!"

Among these visitors who should arrive one evening but Bobby and Billy Gough, the flaxen-haired *Levant Brothers*, home from a seasonal engagement in America. They came in their little top-heavy green-painted wagon and they stayed for several days. The first intimation that Luke had of their arrival (for he had been practising in the evening and afterwards had gone straight to his bed in the loft) was the sight of that wagon at six o'clock in the morning, drawn up next to the Lorraines' in the yard. As he stood looking at its sloped green sides and carved eaves, Luke's spirits floundered headlong into an abyss of humiliating memory, in which a small and disappointed boy endured the loud laughter of two flaxen-haired gods to whom he had worshipfully offered himself. Bobby and Billy laughing, old Marta calling him a chump, the whole of Beckett's laughing at him, or trying to comfort him with their kindly patronage, as they might comfort a sensitive dog that had shrunk into a corner, abashed by ridicule. And then the bitterness of the journey back to number nineteen, and away from the world of heart's desire, with no consolation but a fourpenny bit, held deep in the pocket of his little knee breeches between a sticky thumb and forefinger. . . . For an instant, Luke, staring in dismay at the green wagon, relived these things. Then he flung back his head and laughed. "That was years and years ago," he told himself.

From within the wagon came a duet of contented snoring; its top-heavy body swayed gently as a snorer turned in his sleep.

Luke went across the courtyard and into the fields to look for Damson. "I should know 'em anywhere," he thought, as a vision of two comic-featured, pointed-chinned, smiling faces rose in his mind. "Aye, anywhere. But I'll lay my life they don't know me."

They didn't know him. At breakfast he was introduced to them as "our lad, Moppits," and after breakfast he was deputed to show them round the premises. Hands in pockets, smiling, they followed him from the orchard to the fields, from the fields to the great barn, from the barn to the elephant shed, from the elephant shed to the practice shed. "A bit of all right," said Bobby. "Pretty," said Billy. "Eversernice," said Bobby. "Swell," said Billy. On the day they left they presented "Our lad Moppits" with a dollar apiece, and Luke said, "Thank you, sir," to each of them, and put the dollars in the savings bank for Castelli's Circus.

Towards Christmas the company at Gaythorne thinned out. Old Moomoo and little Herman went up to London to play in pantomime, as also did Matthew with six of the smallest ponies, together with seven year old Bella, six year old Susannah, and five year old Henry, who were to appear as elfin riders on three of the ponies. Edwina went to look after the children, and Matthew's wife, Hester, went also. Hester would go, because she refused to be parted from little Henry, though Matthew prophesied she would be brought to bed in a caravan yard, Kentish town, before the month was up.

"And as well there as anywhere," answered Hester cheerfully, "since brought to bed I must be."

Julia, Dolf, Cyrus and Flora went to Glasgow for the winter circus, and Sarah and Helena to Liverpool. Andrew kissed Euphemia good-bye and took train to Leeds where he was to play in *Puss in Boots* for six weeks. Alphonse and Frieda had an offer for their Human Target act in a show at Bristol. Alphonse was ill, Frieda tried to dissuade him.

"You are afraid?" said Alphonse. "You think I miss my aim and murder you, ma chérie?"

"No, no, mein Herz-Geliebte," said Frieda, and she swathed up his delicate chest in an extra thick red muffler she had been knitting for him, and packed three bottles of cough mixture in the

gladstone bag, along with his leather chaps, moccasins and beaded waistcoat, and away they went, after handing over the care of Cracow, the grizzly, to Walter Orde and Luke—a care which Walter Orde did not relish.

Old Sam made some sarcastic remarks over this exodus of half of his family. Better they stayed at Gaythorne and continued their training for next season, he said, than go scampering here, there, and everywhere for the sake of a few paltry saltees. Hadn't he the gingerbread enough for all of them, didn't he keep them free all the winter and pay them the needful all summer? It was he who would suffer for this, later on, when they returned worn out, and not fit for anything.

"You say the same every year," remarked Tommy Beckett who, as eldest son, considered it his job to stay with the old man at Gaythorne and keep an eye on things. "If it narks you, why let 'em go?"

Sam let them go, understanding in his sympathetic old heart the lure of those few paltry extra saltees, but feeling justified in being narked, none the less, and in expressing his vexation in good round terms.

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## I X

ONE day in January, after watching his grandchild, Anna, through her trapeze practice and holding a consultation with Alf and Tommy, old Sam put on his warmest overcoat, which was a grand affair with a fur collar and lining, and himself set off for London. When he returned he brought with him a youth of about twenty called Piero Leone.

Leone was welcomed at Gaythorne with much cordiality. Every one had heard of him, he was a rising star in the circus profession. He was one of the very few trapeze artists in the world who could perform the triple somersault. Maybe he thought a bit too highly of himself: yes, certainly he did, but there, he was an upstart, a newcomer with no long family tradition behind him to make him understand that among the best circus folk modesty is an ingrained virtue, the work at all times being more important than the worker, the success of the show counting for everything and the personal glory of the individual for very little. Perhaps you couldn't expect a newcomer quite to get a grip of this fact, and perhaps, with his exceptional talent and exceptional beauty, a certain amount of self-conceit, in such a newcomer, was allowable. The Beckett family were inclined to be tolerant of Leone's known weakness; not to approve it, mind you, but to smile at it.

And talk about beauty! Heavens, the young man was a very Apollo! His features were severely classic; his eyes soft and brown, with a peculiar all-over lustre about them, eyes that could change, when their owner was hurt or annoyed, to the colour of burning peat. His forehead was smooth and broad, not too high and not too low, his hair black and crisply curling. His exquisitely shaped lips were perhaps a trifle petulant in expression, and his rounded chin—yes, not quite firm enough for a man's. But then, what a neck, what delicately beautiful hands and feet, what perfectly proportioned limbs! Look at the wrists, the ankles, the calf, the shoulder—as members of a profession in which physical beauty, whether of man or beast, is a real asset, the Beckett

family noted Leone's "points" with whole-hearted enthusiasm. That was next morning, of course, when they saw him stripped for a rehearsal on the trapeze with Anna. At first meeting what they saw was a handsome fop, in a check overcoat that must have cost a mint of money, shoes of the softest and most expensive leather, and a black velour hat with a broad brim. A somewhat extravagant taste in dress, undoubtedly, but circus folk are naturally interested in dress, and Leone's outfit met with entire approval.

It was not left to Luke, this time, to show the guest round the premises. Old Sam undertook that office himself. Old Sam was all wrought up by the importance of the occasion. He had probably secured Leone for the coming season (it depended, as the young man had explained, on whether he found he could "work with the girl"). It would be grand publicity for Beckett's to be able to foot their bills with Leone's name, not that Beckett's needed extra publicity, no, no, old Sam was too proud of his reputation as a showman to admit that, but still, a triple somersault on the flying trapeze—how many showmen in the world could include that item in their programme?

So, in the morning, before the rehearsal, old Sam, with a very alert eye and a rather grim smile, stumped round his estate and introduced Leone to the three elephants and the eleven "cats," and the twelve performing dogs and the eight performing monkeys, and to the grizzly, and to the liberty horses, and draught-horses and rosin-backs, and to the wagons and the equipment generally, even to the stiff folds of the big-top, as it hung, looped over the beams, in the great barn.

"There you are. We seat three thousand comfortable, and not a leak anywhere."

And Leone said that last season in Germany he had worked on a show that sat fifteen thousand, a show that possessed fifteen elephants, and a mixed group of thirty cats, and a troupe of zebras, ten polar bears, fifteen seals, twenty-four performing monkeys, besides kangaroos, wolves, leopards, jaguars, two gorillas, and at least four times as many horses as Beckett's.

And Sam Beckett, not at all impressed, said "Baloney" under his breath, and felt that after all (so little did this honest old showman think of any man's boasting) it might be just as

well if young Piero Leone found that he could not "work with the girl." Business is business, of course, and talent is talent, and a good showman must ever welcome the best, but—well, really, who did young pansy-eyes think he was taking in with his big talk? A Rum-Cul like old Sam Beckett? No, sir, not likely!

So Sam, grunting audibly and not too pleased, marched Leone to the practice shed, and there all the Becketts, big and little, who were still at Gaythorne, assembled to see how their guest would shape on the trapeze. And he shaped so magnificently that they all agreed they had never seen anything like it, and, in consideration of his marvellous talent, every shortcoming of temperament was instantly forgiven him, even by old Sam.

Tommy Beckett, the reckless, took old Sam aside and said, "Pay him whatever he asks, Dad." Alfy Beckett, the cautious, who as catcher had been up aloft with Leone, limped over to them. "You might go farther and fare wuss," he said.

"I ain't goin' further," answered Sam, "not if he's agreeable!"

With his beautiful body wrapped in a dressing-gown of red velvet embroidered in gold thread, Leone sat cross-legged on a box, surrounded by a concourse of Becketts, sunning himself in the unstinted praise they gave for his performance. That was what Leone liked, praise, adulation; it was meat and drink to his spirit, it warmed and fed and clothed him, he could not live without it. There was only one member of the Beckett family, except the Boss, who had not yet accorded to him this daily bread for which he daily prayed, and that was the young girl, Anna. In her tights and her tunic she was walking away from him now with that panther-like tread of hers; a proud, elegant little figure, a little Miss Self-Sufficient who had not yet bowed to him. Leone's somewhat expressionless eyes glowed redly as he watched her—she had not even troubled to take the curling rags out of her hair before rehearsing with him!

Here was the Boss, breaking away from his two eldest sons and stumping over to Leone. Another stiff-neck; that was where the little Miss got her airs from. But with the old stiff-neck it was business, with the young one it was—what?—pride?

"Ver-ry well." Leone's spirit nodded loftily to Leone.  
"Ver-ry well. We shall see."

"Well?" said old Sam.

"I shall come to you," answered Leone. "The girl will improve under my instructions. And she is pretty."

"I don't like him," said Anna to her uncle Alf. "He thinks too much of hisself."

"But he's got the goods," answered uncle Alf. "'Tis that what counts."

That same day, in the presence of Alf and Tommy, Piero Leone put his flourishing signature to a printed contract form, and old Sam, who had not much ability with a pen, added his scrawl, and so, having engaged himself to travel with Beckett's Circus for the coming season, Leone got into his dandy check overcoat, put on his wide-brimmed velour hat, was driven by Tommy to the nearest railway station, in a red-wheeled barouche drawn by two piebalds, and departed by train for London.

A few days later, Luke was sitting on a log at the far end of the orchard reading a book he had found in Alphonse's wagon. The book was about circus origins, there was a picture of a Roman amphitheatre with men on horseback shooting arrows at lions, there was also a picture of Southwark Fair, and a picture of Astley's in 1780, with a horse and rider galloping round the ring under the light of an immense chandelier, and a Joey standing straddle-legged on a strip of carpet.

In the orchard the sun was quite hot; there were silvery fruit buds on the apple trees, and there was fresh green showing amongst the long, yellowish tufts of wet grass. At Luke's end of the orchard it was intensely quiet, not a leaf stirred, not a bird chirruped, but from the end nearest the house where the beast wagons were congregated, there came every now and then a gruff, half-hearted roar, that sounded like the echo of a wave breaking hollowly in some under-water cavern. Sleepy old Cæsar, laziest of lions, was waking up. Perhaps he had just begun to realize that spring was coming, and that only a wall of boarding separated him from the lissom body of the maturing, but still virgin, lioness, Trilby. Following the roar came an angry snarl and a heavy thud, as one of the young lions in the next wagon answered Cæsar's mumbled challenge by hurling himself against the side



of his cage. The silence again, then the low roar repeated, and the snarl and the thud. . . .

"The founder of the modern circus was Philip Astley, son of a cabinet maker, born in 1742—"

"Moppits."

"Yes, Miss Anna?"

She had come up so quietly that he had not realized her presence until she spoke. He looked up and saw her standing between him and the sun. The strain of reading, for he was no scholar, had set a frown between his eyes, and dazed them so that Anna and the brightness of the morning seemed to run together into something very pleasant, but hazy of outline.

"I seed you from the winder," said Anna. "Can you read, Moppits, or are you just lookin' at the pickshers?"

"I can read, all right," answered Luke.

Anna stood with her feet together looking down at him. Luke put up a hand to shield his eyes, so that he could see her the better. Her voice hadn't sounded quite so clear and distinct as usual, there was a hesitancy, a softness in it; and now that he saw her face plainly he noticed that it, too, was very slightly clouded by self-consciousness. Evidently his lady had something on her mind.

"I do aught?" he asked.

"Frieda can read," went on Anna, as if she hadn't heard his question. "But Frieda ain't here. Can you read writing, Moppits, or only books?"

"Writing or books, it's all one."

"I had a letter this mornin'," said Anna, "but nobody don't know it, except Barnaby. Barnaby meets the postman outside the elephant shed, and I was goin' across with a coconut for Moll, because I likes to see her crack it open with her toe nail. And I see Barnaby turnin' over some letters, and he says to me, 'Looks like this one is for you, Miss.' And I says, 'Oh, thank you;' because how can I ask Barnaby to read my letter for me?"

It came to Luke then with a curious shock that his lady could neither read nor write. So amazingly gifted did she seem to him that he had not realized that there was anything she could not do.

"And so," went on Anna slowly. "If I was to say 'will yer read it—' would yer?"

"'Course I will."

Anna was wearing a long wine-coloured coat with an astrakhan tippet. She had her hands crossed and tucked inside the tippet as if they were cold. Now, almost reluctantly, she brought out the right hand and placed a mauve-tinted envelope over the picture of Astley's on Luke's open book. The envelope was addressed:

Miss Anna Beckett,  
Gaythorne,  
Hazlefield,  
Kent.

The writing was sloped and ornamented with many flourishes.

"You know," she said, "I guess it's from that Leone. Because when he was goin' he says to me, 'I'll be writin'.' She looked at the envelope curiously and with some aversion, rather as if it were a snake that lay coiled there on the page of the circus book.

"You going to open it?" asked Luke.

"No, you."

Luke took out his penknife and slit open the envelope. He was about to unfold the double sheet of paper inside when Anna prevented him. "No, no!" she cried. "Put it back. Here, give it to me! How do I know what he'll say?"

Luke slipped the letter into its envelope and handed it to Anna. She tucked it once more under her tippet and walked a little way from him over the yellow grass. Then she walked back again.

"You won't laugh at me, Moppits, whatever he says?"

"Why, no, Miss Anna." Laugh at her! How could he?

"Swear you won't?"

"Of course I swear."

"Then——" once more the letter came out from under the tippet. "Read it, Moppits, please. I'd sooner you nor any one since Frieda ain't home."

This great compliment touched Luke, but something else

touched him still more deeply—the gentle, almost appealing mood of his usually so haughty little lady. Luke understood that she was suffering from a sense of disadvantage. It made him feel very tender towards her, but at the same time uncomfortable. He was now in a position of superiority, and that must be galling to her pride. The slave and the slave-owner seemed momentarily to have changed places. “I’ll learn her to read,” he thought, “and I’ll learn her to write, if she’ll let me.”

He unfolded the letter and read:

“Dear Anna,

“Why did you turn your back and walk away from me? You are only fourteen and I am twenty. Also I can do the triple and you cannot and never will. But you and me are going to work together and so we must not be as enemies. It is a great honour to work with Piero Leone. So send me a line how you are getting on, and do not forget next time that I like your face better than your back.

“I remain,

“Your well wisher,

“P L.”

The colour flared into Anna’s face. “The bloomin’ sauce!” she exclaimed. “I shan’t send him no line, would you?”

“Not if you don’t want to.”

“I don’t want to. I won’t!” cried Anna.

Luke handed her back the letter. Her cheeks were white, now. She looked cold and sick.

She went away and came back again to ask him to swear that he wouldn’t tell any one. She stood in front of him looking up at the tiny silvery buds on the apple bough.

“Do you think he’s very handsome, Moppits?” she asked.

“Why, yes,” said Luke, “I do.”

“So do I,” said Anna. “That’s the—No, I don’t then. He’s ugly, Moppits, ugly! ugly! ugly!”

Two or three evenings later, when Luke was working in the practice shed, Anna came calling him. “You didn’t ought to fasten yourself in,” she said severely, when he opened the door for her. “Haven’t you done enough for to-night?”

The hurricane lamp, set on the ground, threw bars of shadow across her face, but neither the shadows, nor the severe tones in which she spoke, deceived Luke. Alert to her every mood, he noticed again the hesitancy, the slightly clouded expression.

"Want me?" he asked.

"Yes." Without another word Anna watched him whilst he put on his coat and took up the lantern. Then she looked up at the shadow of the low-wire that stretched vague and gigantic across the opposite wall. "I've been thinkin' I will drop Leone a line," she said, "if you'll write it for me."

Walter Orde had gone down to the King's Head, and wouldn't be back for an hour or more. Luke and Anna went up into the loft. Anna sat on Luke's bed. Luke took a bottle of ink from a ledge under the rafters, and got a sheet of notepaper and an envelope from a box under the bed. Then he sat beside her.

"I'm no grand scholar," he said. "What did you want me to say?"

"I don't know as I want to say nothin'," answered Anna. "And yet I do. Shall I hold the binco for you, so's you can see?"

"Come on my left side then. That's the ticket. Now."

He spread the sheet of notepaper on a piece of cardboard on his knee and dipped the pen in the ink bottle. Anna held the lantern so that the shadow of his hand fell away from the paper. And so she dictated her first letter.

"Dear Piero Leone,

"I had your letter all right. As you said we shall be working together next season. You may work good, but I shall work better."

She paused. "That's all. How did I ought to end it, Moppits? What do folk say?"

"It's all according as they feel," explained Luke. "Times they say 'with love' and times they say 'yours faithfully.'"

"Then seeing as I don't love him," remarked Anna drily, "I'll say 'yours faithfully.'"

"Yours," wrote Luke, and considered. Did you spell "faithfully" with two "ll's" or with one? "Why not 'yours truly,' " he suggested. "It's shorter."

"All right," said Anna.

But—"truly"—did you spell it with an "e" or without an "e"? "Why not just 'yours'?" he counselled. "That's shorter still."

Anna laughed. "Short'n sour, like Barnum's dwarf. Now write 'Anna.'"

"I'm sure you ought to write that," said Luke. "Else it's forging."

"I can't, Moppits."

"Yes you can. Give's your hand. Hold the pen light or you'll put a hole through the paper. Let your hand go slack. That's champion. That's prettier writing than mine," he said, as he guided the little hand that rested on his knee.

Anna.

Holding the lantern close, Anna regarded her signature. "It looks comical to me," she remarked. Then, voicing the thought in his mind, "Learn me to write, will you, Moppits?"

"And read too," answered Luke eagerly.

"We'll begin to-morrer then," said Anna. "Quick, Moppits, put it in an envelope and lick it up. Do you think I'm soft to send him a line, and him so cheeky?"

"Perhaps you wanted to tell him off?" suggested Luke.

"Perhaps I did," answered Anna. "Or perhaps I didn't. Were you ever in love, Moppits?"

"Not exactly. But I've got a girl."

"What's her name?"

"Elsie."

"Is she beautiful?"

Luke considered. "Yes," he said after a pause.

"That's it," said Anna. "When I see Leone I thinks 'I don't like you.' And I tries to look him in the eyes and think like that. So I faces up to him and what I wanted to think went out of my head, like as if I was daft. All I could think on was 'he's beautiful,' and the thought made me go hot. I felt like crying. So I turns my back on him and walks away. But you won't let on what I've told yer, Moppits?"

"No."

"And you'll post my letter in the morning?"

"Aye."

Anna stood up and swung the hurricane lamp meditatively, so that the shadows of herself and Luke, and of the curved pattern work of the iron bed head moved gently backwards and forwards along the wall.

"If he was a prad," she said thoughtfully, "why then it would be all right. I could look on him and think 'how beautiful he is!' What does he want to come for? I wish he wasn't. No, I wish I wished he wasn't. But if he don't come, I shall scream with rage."

"He's coming, whether or no," said Luke.

He lighted her down the loft ladder and across the yard. Then he came back to sit on his bed and ruminate.

Girls were funny. But that was a conclusion he had arrived at long ago. Anna was so proud, and yet her pride seemed to have completely failed her. Was it love that had got hold of her and snatched away her pride? And, if so, was it a good thing or a bad thing? Love? She was but fourteen, and yet he, Luke, had never begun to feel about Elsie as Anna was already feeling about Leone. Maybe he would never love anybody, maybe this other thing—Castelli's Circus—was too important to allow him to think in the correct manner about a girl. Elsie—why, he had scarcely given a thought to her in all these months! That wasn't right. His mind went back to the night when he had kissed her good-bye in the Endcliffe fields; how she had clung to him and made him promise—promise—— It hadn't occurred to him that she meant it so very deeply, or that it was necessary for him to bother much about her until the time came for them to marry. But maybe he was wrong? Anna meant what she said. So why not Elsie?

Aye, girls were funny. After some further rumination, Luke dived under his bed for some more notepaper, dipped his pen once again into the ink bottle, and settled down to write a long letter to his girl.

Was he making a lot of spelling faults, he wondered. For the first time in his life Luke wished that he was more of a scholar. To-morrow he would buy a dictionary and learn to spell properly. Otherwise he might shame himself and let down Anna when he taught her to read and write.

## X

By the beginning of February the complete personnel of Beckett's had returned to Gaythorne, and none too soon, as old Sam declared. The circus was to take the road in March, there were all the wagons to be given a fresh coat of blue, yellow and red paint, the show front to be washed and touched-up and relettered, the beast wagons to be redecorated, and all the ring properties—spring-boards, jumping gates, tubs, see-saws, tables, pedestals, and the like, to be repainted. There were decorated hoops to be made for the new pony act, and balloons and garters for the lady riders. Nor was this all: guy-ropes, stays, poles and canvas must be looked over and any defects righted; axle-trees, hubs, springs and screw-brakes must be greased, wheel-spokes must be tested and if necessary replaced, fellies, bands and shafts examined; the covers of the "so very lumpy cushions" must be washed, also the draperies that screened off the best seats; the heavy velvet curtains for the front and back entrances hung out in the sun and brushed, harness cleaned and repaired, costumes overhauled, new flags provided for the king-poles (the old ones having been torn to ribbons by the October gale) and old Sam's two dozen pairs of ring-master's white gloves must be washed, darned and laid ready in the top drawer of the chest in his wagon.

And, of course, work in the practice shed must be redoubled, dog and monkey acts rehearsed daily, and the horses and ponies put through their paces on every fine afternoon; the advance agent must be seen and the route fixed, coloured posters and bills got out, and the requisite number, according to population and posting facilities, allocated to each town that the circus would visit. Sam was busy from early morning until dark; no more afternoon naps for him until Beckett's was under way, the energetic tock, tock, of Mo'gany Joe was heard in the yard, in the stables, in the barns and sheds, his great voice roared from one end of Gaythorne to the other, all the gigantic energy of the man that had built up Beckett's and meant to keep it going, was roused now to demoniac pitch. Beckett's was moving out this year, as

every year, perfect in every detail; no sloppy work, no dilapidated properties, no tumble-down wagons, no half-rotten canvas or fraying ropes, no thank you, not for Sam Beckett. You promised your public to give of your best, and you kept your promises, so see to it Tommy, Jack, Alf, Matthew, George and all the rest of you, get a move on, put your backs into it, do your damndest, or it will be the worse for you; old Sam's fierce blue eyes are missing nothing.

The last of the company to return to Gaythorne were Alphonse and Frieda. Meanwhile little Herman had been living in the wagon with Matthew and his wife and five year old Henry, and the new baby girl who had been born, as Matthew had prophesied, in Caravan Yard behind the theatre in Kentish Town, one sleety night whilst the performance of *Cinderella* was in full swing—a circumstance which had decided the child's name and saved Matthew and Hester no end of bother.

The baby Cinderella was barely a fortnight old, and Herman was crooning it to sleep one night at Gaythorne, when familiar steps were heard picking their way through the darkness of the yard.

Pappa! Mütterchen! Cinderella was thrust into Hester's arms, little Herman was out of the wagon with one bound, and there was such a laughing and weeping and embracing in the starlight as would make you think little Herman and his parents had been separated not for six weeks but for six years. But what was this? Another figure standing with Pappa and Mütterchen under the stars, a broad-shouldered, silent figure, taller than Pappa and Mütterchen, and so bulky in its travelling ulster that the whole of Charles Wain disappeared from little Herman's sight as he peered up at the stranger.

"Your uncle," said Frieda tenderly. "Kiss him, *mein liebchen*."

Dutifully little Herman tilted his face and the stranger stooped. Over the stranger's head the four glittering points of Charles Wain swung into view again. There were wagons in the sky as well as in the yard, wagons, bears, lions, horses, and dogs, little Herman had known that for long enough, it was not only on earth that there were circuses. Yes, he smelled nice, this stranger, clean and soapy, but not too scented, and his lips were



soft, and his voice slow and calm like Mütterchen's, only with a manly rumble in it.

"*Guten Abend, kleine Herman.*"

Half an hour later, Herman was running up the ladder to the loft where Luke, with an open dictionary beside him and a copy-book on his knee, sat on his bed making a list of such words as *faithfully* and *truly* and other conundrums in the spelling line, by the light of a guttering candle.

"Zey have arrived," shrilled Herman, "Pappa and Mütterchen and with zem mine uncle. Zey have sent for you. Come and greet zem, come and speak, come and say how do you do to mine uncle Otto!"

Luke clapped the dictionary shut, flung the copy-book on the bed, snuffed out the candle and ran with Herman to the Lorraines' wagon, where he was kissed effusively by Alphonse, embraced by Frieda, and introduced to Otto.

Fair-haired, broad-faced, blue-eyed, wide-shouldered, dignified and pleasant-looking, Frieda's young brother, Otto, made Luke think of a large and kindly-natured dog. His nose had at some time been broken, and its thickened, slightly dented appearance gave character to a face which might have seemed merely amiable without this added touch of distinction. "Been a boxer," thought Luke, "but ain't sharp enough for that trade, would work a strong-man act better."

He sat up late in the Lorraines' wagon, hearing the tale of their adventures in Bristol: how they had kipped in a lodging-house on the quay and been eaten alive by bugs, and how Frieda had itched so badly that she had not been able to stand motionless through the Human Target act; and how, in consequence of an involuntary wriggle, one of Alphonse's knives had pinned her arm to the board. How Alphonse had nearly fainted with distress on seeing the blood redden her embroidered sleeve; how she smiled and bid him carry on, and how, at the end of the act, when he pulled the blade out of her arm, the hall had swum round him; how she had caught and held him, and how, clinging together they had made their bows and how the spectators had cheered; and how they had received a curtain that night, and Frieda a bouquet the following night; and how they had packed up and changed their so dirty and dangerous lodging for a clean

one, and how, on their way back to Gaythorne, Alphonse had had his pocket picked in London and Frieda had fallen in with Otto. A simple story but told with gusto and a wealth of graphic detail. Luke listened absorbed and pouting, and Otto listened smiling, and little Herman fell asleep with his head on Frieda's knees.

Next morning Anna came to the stables where Luke and Walter Orde were hard at work. They brought the horses and ponies in every day now, for a vigorous grooming, lest matted winter coats and tangled manes and tails disgrace the company when Beckett's took the road.

"Gran'pa wants you, Moppits—in the wagon," said Anna.

Luke found old Sam sitting at his table surrounded by a scatter of last year's circus bills. On the floor were sheets of coloured posters, large pictures of lions' hind-quarters, elephants' heads, clowns' bodies, and portions of rearing horses, waiting to be pieced together. Frieda was sitting beside Sam. Frieda, who possessed, as Sam put it "the head piece of the show," served Sam in the unpaid capacity of secretary. Mr. Percy Watkins, the advance agent, a man with a dark, scarred face and thick black side-whiskers, sat opposite Sam. And Otto, looking very large, but trying not to take up much room, stood against the wall between the stove and the bed, with a pile of unfolded poster sheets hiding his boots.

Sam looked bothered, anything to do with papers worried him more than putting his head in a lion's mouth. His harassed mood found vent in snarling at Luke.

"Come at last, have you? God's blood, are we to go tenting next month or next year? Why couldn't you step more lively?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

Old Sam snorted. "Well, now you are here, hark to me. I can get stable lads a-plenty. What I want is a wire-walker. One with pep, mind you. No goin' to sleep on the wire. Will you take it, or leave it?"

"I'll—take it, sir."

Steady, steady, steady! Luke's heart was thumping against his chest, tears of joy stood in his eyes, and through the tears he saw that Frieda was smiling at him. He tried to smile back and his lips twitched. Oh beggar it keep calm, you bloody fool!

You knew this was going to happen, sooner or later. God, don't let the Boss look at me, lest he push me back for a nizzie to the horse tent!"

The Boss was not looking at Luke, he was looking irritably at his agent. "Put him down, Watkins."

"Name of?" queried Percy Watkins, who held a quill pen between a very inky forefinger and thumb.

As in a dream, yet a dream that was already familiar, Luke heard Sam's growling voice.

"Luke Ashbourne. The Boy Blondin. In the World's Most Graceful Wire Act. Aye, that's got it. Time, ten minutes. And hark'ee lad," Sam added, turning on Luke with a ferocity that did much to steady Luke's excitement. "The World's Most Graceful Wire Act. That's what it'll say on the programmes and that's what it must be. Beckett's don't bill one thing and show another. So, if you can't make it, off you'll come. And remember I ain't satisfied till you can work a forward somersault. Any fool can do a back, but what I want is a forward. And don't tell me it can't be done, because I've seen it done."

The glare old Sam turned on Luke as he spoke these words was really ferocious, but old Sam was not feeling ferocious, far from it. He knew, the old rascal, just what Luke was experiencing. The tears in Luke's eyes amused and gratified him—oh yes, he had seen them right enough, out of the side of his head, as it were. A lad after old Sam's heart, a lad that had ambition and wouldn't be content till he got somewhere. Mention a forward somersault on the wire, and he'd do it. Sam almost wished he'd said a double forward . . . but there, the lad was but a lad, wouldn't do for him to break his neck, yet awhile.

"Did I hear you say something about a perch act?"

"I did it a year ago, in panto, sir."

"Can you do it now?"

"I—I think I could."

"Top-mounter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, here's your carrier." Sam nodded over his shoulder to Otto. "A young feller as has no business to be boxin' when he can do better."

Otto grinned. "My top-mounter 'e break 'ee's back, six months ago, and a man must live," he explained.

"So you broke your nose?" grunted Sam. "Well, get at it, both. You'll find a perch and a pedestal and a ladder and a what-else in the barn. See how you shape by dinner-time. You've a month yet, but I got to get my programme out to-day. And I ain't havin' no last minute scramble. What's down in the programme stays in. Put 'em down, Watkins. The two What-a-may-calls—well—Schillers—that's your name, ain't it?" (to Otto) 'Daring Equilibrists and Perchists. Continental Success in Balanced Unparalleled.' If they can't do it, we can scratch 'em off this afternoon and put in George's poodles. Time, twelve minutes. Now be off the pair of ye, the sooner the better."

When Sam went to the practice shed at dinner-time to see how Luke and Otto shaped, he swore at them for a couple of noodles who might never have seen a perch nor yet a ladder, before that hour. Otto lay on his back on a pedestal and balanced a stave of the ladder on one foot. Luke climbed up the ladder and balanced on his head on the opposite stave. It was only by the utmost strain that he could accomplish this, he swayed and came perilously near to falling, for he was completely out of practice. When he had climbed down again, old Sam told him that little Henry could have done it better. Then Otto balanced a perch of steel on his shoulder and stood with eyes upturned, watching the cautiously ascending Luke. The perch swayed and bowed, Otto with arms outstretched, knees slightly bent and eyes ever upward, moved cautiously against the inclination of the swaying steel, and cautiously Luke, at the top, assumed one acrobatic pose after another.

God's blood and body, it wouldn't do at all, there was no go about it, no ease, no grace, they were like a couple of worn-out rheumatic old hacks ready for the knackers! Call that an act? Sam and his wooden leg could make a better one! Old Sam stamped away in a bluster of rage, but he did not scratch the two Schillers off the programme, indeed he gave them a line to themselves in moderate sized print on some of the larger posters. The two Schillers, thus discouraged, practised morning, afternoon and evening.

In a clearing in the orchard the big steel cage had been set up

and connected by runways to the beast wagons. Here, twice a day, Checko rehearsed his cats. Dressed only in shirt and light trousers and soft leather boots reaching to his calves, he entered the steel cage holding a small whip in one hand and a small red stick in the other. The whip was to give his pupils "the office," the stick, which had a little metal hook on the end of it, was the fork with which he handed them their reward for tricks prettily executed. Checko's trouser pockets were full of cubes of juicy red meat for good cats; bad, sulky cats got nothing but a talking to in Checko's firm but cajoling voice, a voice never, under any circumstances, raised or hurried. Keeping his face ever towards his pupils and his back well away from the bars of the cage (for it is dangerous to be cornered even by a frolicsome lion or tiger), Checko moved among his big cats with the agile step of a dancer.

"Rex, Duchess, Duke, Ferdinand, Marian-na, Juanita, Cæsar, Cæsar!" Checko's dulcet voice cooed its commands, Checko's little whip cracked and flickered; the beasts loped on padded feet about the cage, walked on barrels, leaped over Checko's head, formed pyramids, sat up, grouped themselves on their bellies about his reclining body and, after each trick, jumped back to their pedestals and watched with yellow eyes as the stick, with its little tit-bit of meat, was passed by Checko from mouth to mouth. Such an amiable, docile company, you would have said, had you been watching, "*Wild* beasts, did you say? Why, it's safe for anybody to go into that cage! Just look at them—like a pack of old sheep, no danger about *them*!"

Yet Checko's quick eyes are ever on the watch, and every time he enters that cage he takes his life in his hands. That great, dark-maned lion there, yawning on his pedestal like a sleepy tom-cat, once, in a fit of sex-jealousy, tore away the top of Checko's scalp. That beautiful tigress, who, standing in the middle of the see-saw, rubs her heavy head so affectionately against Checko's cheek, once, because a wasp stung her, sprang on Checko, rolled over and over with him, and sent him to hospital for eight months with twenty deep wounds on his arms and chest. Once Checko was set on by the whole group, except old Cæsar, who sat and looked on, like a king at a tournament, and that time Checko's leg was bitten through and his whole body running with blood. No, never for five minutes can you rely on

a big cat's temper; they are fashioned for killing and sometimes they will kill; you can only watch them, love them, persuade them, reward them, and, when they are angry, offer them the wooden stick instead of your body to vent their spite on, and so hope for the best. And if you are Checko, and have lived, day and night, for years on end, close to your cats, you possess also this safeguard, a kind of instinct, or sixth sense, which tells you what is going on in the beasts' minds, which enables you to know that Marianna is feeling irritable, or Ferdinand love-sick, which warns you, almost by the flicker of an eyelid, when trouble is brewing. For the tawny, yellow-eyed faces of his cats are as expressive to Checko as the faces of his fellow-men.

That is not the case with Alphonse and Cracow, the big grizzly, and that is where the trouble comes in. No one, either by love, instinct, patience or inspiration, has ever been able to read the mind of Cracow. Cracow's face reveals nothing to any man on earth; his little, deep-set eyes glitter with the same inhuman expressionlessness, his long muzzle presents the same wooden immobility of appearance, whether Cracow is feeling murderous towards Alphonse, or merely lazily indifferent. That is why Alphonse says that Cracow will one day suck his throat. Except his stomach, there is nothing in all Cracow's eight hundred pounds weight of body that any man can appeal to.

Each day, now, Cracow is led out of his commodious stable in the disused pigsties and put through his tricks. Speedily, after each trick, he is given a lump of sugar, and sometimes an additional lump half-way through his trick. Somewhat hurriedly the act goes through, and somewhat hurriedly and with the lure of more sugar lumps, Cracow is led back to his stable. Ah, mon Dieu! but Alphonse is glad when he has once more turned the key of the pigsty on him!

Alphonse envies Matthew with his monkeys, and George with his poodles. (Yes, the Boss has found room to include the poodles on the programme, a dog act always goes down well with the women in the audience.) To watch George's poodles go through their rehearsal is like watching a set of eager children at a Christmas party. It is all "Hurrah! Here we go! Me next! No, me, let me! Please *I* want to play!" to the accompaniment of quick tail waggings and joyous barks. And though Matthew's

monkeys are not so inspiring, for even through their liveliest antics their little faces wear an expression of unutterable melancholy, still, there is something in a monkey that a man can appeal to. See that one now, cuddling up in Matthew's arms and raising a little hand as smooth as a kid glove to stroke Matthew's cheek! Is it not pathetic and altogether charming, yes? Alphonse would like to know when Cracow has ever shown himself pathetic or charming, or anything but a wooden-faced old hypocrite that watches his opportunity with beady, expressionless eyes. Yes, all in good time Cracow will show Alphonse. . . . Eh bien! A man can die but once.

And in the meantime here comes March, bringing brisk winds, greening buds, and a landscape dappled with sunshine and moving cloud shadows.

"Zey are tenting up zere," said little Herman softly, tilting back his head to watch the stately procession of the clouds, big and little. "Zey have all new canvas zis season," said little Herman, for the clouds were very white.

On the slopes of the fields about Gaythorne the fresh young green of the grass was starred with daisies, and along the lower hedges the tender green was trampled into mud by hundreds of spring-excited restless hoofs. Chaffinches sang in the orchard trees; the orchard banks were frailly scented with clustering primroses, the Beckett children rubbed their little noses in the delicate petals and, exhilarated by the smell and the bustle of coming departure, performed astonishing acrobatic feats in the long, wet orchard grass. "We're goin' tentin', we're goin' tentin'!" they shrilled as they turned head-over-heels.

In the courtyard the living wagons were gay with fresh curtains; wheels and underworks gleamed redly under the newly decorated blue and yellow bodies. Women's voices called from within, other women handed up armfuls of brilliant clothing and boxes and hampers of provisions. Men sat about rubbing up belts and riding boots, mending whips, splicing rope, and wiping the mildew off long-disused garments of coloured leather. The courtyard hummed with voices, with laughter, singing, and whistling. Every one rejoiced that spring had come, and, with it, the time to go tenting. Forgotten now that autumn longing for rest and sleep; every one was weary of sticking about at Gay-

thorne. Rust, mildew and dull thoughts were the guerdon of folk who stayed too long in one place. You must keep on the move if you wished to keep alive, if you did not wish, indeed, to develop into a Flatty.

Beyond the yard, drawn up on each side of the cart-track, stood the newly painted horse-lorries, piled high with bales of canvas and poles and properties. And farther up the cart-track the big barn was empty with locked doors. To-morrow, before dawn, Beckett's would take the road.



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## X I

Beckett's Circus, Colborough,

*May 2nd.*

DEAR Gran'an,

I hope you got my letters all right. I have had no answers of late, but sometimes letters get lost en route. Enclosed please find route for next fortnight from Monday. First week, Manham, Twby, Melborough, Coalsorrel, Beaford, Huckham. Second week, Market Stone, Conbury, Church Buckworth, Dewchester, Oakwood, Millar's Edge.

We are making across country, you see, through Notts and Derbyshire, the last named are in Cheshire.

I am in the best of health and wire act going good. Also perch act with Otto, who is a real cul. Him and me does everything together, Sunday outings and such. I would like for you to make his ackwaintance. I kip with him in Alfy's wagon now, being promoted from the horse tent. He is learning me German. It makes all the difference to have a cul. The Boss in very good temper this last month but whether good or bad all work well for him. The show going grand. Last Saturday night a turn-away at Bournfleet. The big draw is Leone and Anna on the Trapeze. There are four foals born (all doing well), also three cubs to Duchess which is a draw in the menagerie. The Beckett kids are all over them, so Checko says their life is a toss-up. But he guards them more close than a mother and no harm done, except the father, Duke, overfond, swinging them up in his jaws and padding round with them so would kill them for kindness. For the Boss will have him shown with them to the public as he says its good for trade.

Frieda Lorraine has made me a champion costume (Spanish) for the wire act, blue and rose with gold facings. Red hat loaned by Dolf. Some toff. I would like for you to see it. I can do a back somersault on the wire easy now and never miss, but not a forward yet. The Boss rousts me over this, you would think he was mad at me but that's his way. Never no praise.

Matthew Beckett bought a young orang at Shermer-on-Sea, but it took sick and died. He had it in a blanket three days in the wagon and fed it with a bottle but all come to naught. It vomited that bad. It held his hand and died like a Christian. Little Herman cried over it sorely, he had thought to show it in the novelty tent. The Boss said show it dead then, but little Herman wouldn't. He was still crying when he went in the ring, but the flatties thought he was acting good and laughed so all was well. Moll our big elephant is that devoted to Barnaby she won't let him out of her sight. Consequently he can't never ride her but has to walk alongside where she can see him. So Otto and me rides her on parades which is handy for looking into shop windows. Otto buys himself fancy waistcoats and shirts. I would like, but am saving. Well if you join us at any of the above named places you will receive a warm welcome from all and especially from your loving

Luke.

Marta had not long returned from a jaunt to one of the north country May-day fairs when Mr. Whale handed her Luke's letter. When she had read it, a business which entailed time, hard concentration, and a vast amount of muttering, she went into the stables and harnessed old Steve, the sedate and elderly black horse that Mr. Whale allowed her to hire for next to nothing, partly out of respect for Marta's admirable qualities, and partly because, with his lean ribs and bony haunches, old Steve no longer looked well at a funeral.

"We're off again, old boy," said Marta, as she led out the patient Steve and backed him between her wagon shafts.

Then she chivvied her protesting chickens into their travelling coop and set off for Millar's Edge.

On the first day out, as she was driving down a stony hill, the door of the chicken coop jerked open and the birds escaped, a result of her being over-excited and hasty in packing, as Marta explained to the gentleman on a bicycle who pedalled after her to cry halt to her impetuous urging of Old Steve and to help her pursue and capture the chickens.

Marta offered him a bird for his trouble, after having first discreetly retired into the wagon to wring its neck, and to find

a piece of stout string by which it could be suspended behind the saddle of the bicycle.

"And when I says 'yes' 'tis no good anybody's saying no," she announced to the embarrassed good Samaritan, as she sent him off with the dead chicken dangling behind him.

There were other delays, a going out of her course, due to an old barn being pulled down and a row of cottages built since last Marta had driven that way; and to the temptation of a village horse show which, despite her eagerness to get to Beckett's and clasp her great-nephew once more to her heart, Marta could not entirely resist. It took her seven days to reach Millar's Edge, and a good hour, once she had reached it, to find the circus pitch. For the place was full of wide tree-bordered roads and expensive-looking villas, and it sprawled, so it seemed to Marta, half across Cheshire, and, as she said to old Steve, give her any day a tidy little town with the tober set handy behind the pub, and honest folk thronging the pavements, and not so many yob gentry, who looked you up and down as if you were a freak in a side-show, and were too cocky to own they knew there was a circus coming, even with Beckett's twelve-foot posters staring them in the face.

But, no matter, she was in time, Beckett's had not yet arrived, and up a lane, whose wooden palings were plastered with red and yellow bills, Marta drove triumphantly into a large and empty field.

So that the first sight to greet Luke's eyes as, perched beside Otto on the driving seat of Alf's wagon, and ahead of the whole cavalcade, he entered Millar's Edge recreation ground, was Marta herself, with her back towards him and her skirts pinned up over a braided petticoat, moving over the grass, carrying two pails of water. An upright, gallant and solitary figure, with a great expanse of sky over her head and a great expanse of green at her feet. Luke halloed, leaped off the wagon, and ran; and she turned, set down her pails and ran also, and meeting him, reached up her wrinkled brown arms to his neck because, in the intervening year, he had grown taller than herself.

That day at Beckett's Marta Castelli held court again. All the warmth in the hearts of the circus folk flowed out towards their indomitable old comrade; once more, as she sat in the best seats on a "so lumpy cushion," there was a constant coming and

going of artistes to sit and chat with her. It almost seemed to Marta, as she laughed and gossiped, that the past seven years had rolled back, and that she was visiting Beckett's at Mattadale again; her heart was as young, her spirit as lively, her body as strong, her courage as high, now as then. Only now no small circus-enchanted boy sat dreaming at her side, and when her eyes rested on the lithe young figure on the low-wire, so graceful, proud and serious, in rose-coloured shirt, blue bolero and trousers, crimson sash and red toreador hat, Marta smiled and sighed, realizing all the wonder and the pathos of time's passing.

"Heaven bless the lad," she said to Alphonse, who sat with his hand clasped in hers, "he's a chip of the old uns, and no mistake. See how prettily he did that pirouwit? If them that are dust could rise up and behold him, they'd say, 'Good lad, keep it up lad, aye, that's the spirit!'"

"A sight, as you say it, for sore eyes, yes, my Castelli?" purred Alphonse. I always said so, I always knew it. . . . Brahve, bra-ahve, très bien!"

Luke after executing his final forward somersault on the wire, leaped into the ring, flung back his head and stretched out both arms as if to embrace his audience, and it seemed to Marta that in the applause that volleyed round the big-top ghostly hands participated, and ghostly voices, joining in the cheering, cried, "Well done, well done, Castelli!"

"I should like for to put that name on the handbills at the next printing," said old Sam Beckett, when Luke and Marta sat drinking tea with him after the night show. "I dunno what your notion was in not owning up afore. You ain't ashamed of your grandfather, I take it?"

Ashamed? Luke blushed. How could he explain that he was saving up the name against the day he felt worthy of it. "I ain't done nothing good enough, yet," he said.

"So that's the way the wind blows, is it?" said old Sam, and winked at Marta. "But you've no objections, I suppose, to calling yourself yourself, now the cat's out the bag?"

"I'd—I'd rather not, sir."

Why not? Pooh! Sam got angry. He called Luke unflattering names. Any means of self-advertisement, big or small, was important in Sam's eyes. Luke was a gajo, a yob, a flatty, an

outsider, if he couldn't understand the magic that lies hidden in a name.

Luke did understand it, he had hugged that magic to his heart for the past seven years, but he was not ready, yet, to give it to the public. His eyes clouded and his lips pouted as if he were back at 19 Camershaw Road having a difference of opinion with Lilian Castle. He wouldn't, no, he wouldn't, he'd leave Beckett's sooner. He said nothing, he pouted and glowered.

"It's no good, Boss," said Marta chuckling, "when it comes to stubbornness you've met your match."

Old Sam retorted hotly that he'd never met it yet. "The lad's clean crackers!" he said

Yes, Luke might be crackers, perhaps he was; but, if so, crackers he would remain—and plain Luke Ashbourne. One thing he knew with absolute certainty; the advent of Lucio Castelli was not yet.

Old Sam at last had to own himself beaten, but he didn't forgive Luke for days. Perhaps he never quite forgave him until the last day of his life.

The discovery of the true identity of the lad "Moppits" caused much interest and amusement through the entire company. Every one remembered the seven-year-old incident of the little boy who had tried to join the circus at Mattadale and had been hauled home by his indignant great-aunt. Come to think of it, Moppits had always reminded them of someone, it had been a contributory cause of his popularity with them—though his own good nature had been the chief—this familiar unfamiliar person that looked out of his eyes at you, especially when those eyes darkened with strong feeling or eagerness. The sly dog, what was his idea? Well, it explained a lot; it had always been a mystery how a mere gajo came to have such supple limbs and so apt a disposition for ring work.

On the following afternoon, Luke in his rose and blue costume was standing behind the back curtains. It was not his act yet, Moomoo and Norman and little Herman were clowning, and after the clowns, before the low-wire, came Anna's riding act; but Luke was there watching and listening. Every item of the circus programme was of importance to Luke, and this afternoon Moomoo was trying out a new gag. Luke was anxious to note

how it would go down. He was listening intently for it, and watching through the narrow gap between the curtains, when he became conscious that he himself was an object of close attention. Somebody's eyes were on him, somebody's thoughts were concentrated upon him so fixedly that he was obliged to turn round. It was Anna. In her white ballet dress, with its tight low-cut bodice and frothy skirt trimmed with pink rose buds and silver knots, she was seated sideways on Dumpling, her piebald pony, with her ankles crossed and her pink-shod feet pointed stiffly. And she was gazing at Luke with a puzzled intensity that set a tiny frown between her great dark eyes.

"There's a shadder on yer face. Take off yer cady, Moppits," she said.

Obediently Luke took off his hat. Then he smiled and asked her why. But she didn't answer, just went on looking at him, and drew down her brows, and pondered, whilst the shrill voice of little Herman, and the squeaky voice of old Moomoo, and the drawling voice of Norman sounded from the other side of the curtain, interspersed with gusts of laughter. Then, to a louder laughter, little Herman chased hobbling Moomoo and capering Norman out of the ring, and Anna gave Dumpling a smack on his croup with the flat of her hand, and Luke held a curtain aside for her and she cantered through. And Luke, watching her as she jumped the garters and burst the balloon, riding so lightly on Dumpling that it almost seemed she must be a creature without gravity, wondered vaguely why she had asked him to take off his hat, and what there being a shadow on his face had to do with anything.

Several times that day he became aware that Anna was gazing at him. She looked and she looked, and sometimes she frowned and bit her thumb, without taking her eyes off him. In the evening, as Luke, after the pull-down, was crossing the circus lot with Otto, he saw Anna standing in the lighted doorway of her father's wagon. "Moppits?" she called, "Come here, I want to speak to yer."

"Half a mo'," said Luke to Otto. Otto nodded and strolled on his way. Luke went to the foot of Tommy Beckett's wagon. Anna came down the steps. "I want to speak to yer private," she said, and she walked him away out of earshot of the wagon.

It was a misty night, with a young moon brightening the mist to a luminous, half-transparent veil; from the hedge near which they stood came a damp aromatic smell of some plant Luke could not name. Anna, facing the hedge, was tenderly lit and palely mysterious. She had on a short, light-coloured print frock, and Luke could see that she was shivering slightly. "You're cold!" he said.

"No, I ain't cold," answered Anna. Then, slowly, "Say, Moppits, did I once give yer something—for luck?"

"Yes." Luke put his hand deep in his trouser pocket and brought out the fourpenny bit. "That's what you gave me," he said, holding it on his open palm.

Anna came close. She took his palm in her hand and looked curiously at the tiny coin. In the dim light it was a mere filament of silver.

"What is it?" she asked.

"My luck," answered Luke with a little laugh.

"What else is it?"

"A silver fourpenny."

Anna turned his palm to the veiled moonlight. "Yes, I see it now . . . I'm glad yer kept it." Then she let go his hand. "Good-night, Moppits."

"Good-night, Miss Anna."

She walked away towards Tommy Beckett's wagon, and Luke was hurrying to overtake Otto, when he heard her voice calling softly, "Moppits, here a minute, Moppits!"

They met in the middle of the field this time. A light wind blew over the field, the curtain of mist parted momentarily and the young moon shone golden, illumining Anna's earnest face, her searching eyes, her halo of dusky, wind-lifted hair.

"You needn't call me *Miss Anna* no more, Moppits," she said. "I'm Anna to me culs."

This unexpected announcement stirred Luke strangely. It was as if the golden moon took aim with an arrow of swift light, and the arrow shot through him from head to feet. Then the mist covered the moon again, and he found himself, somewhat shamefacedly, thinking of Elsie. "All right," he said rather gruffly and walked away without another word.

There were several wagons drawn up in a line with Alf's,

and one of them was the elaborate, red-painted affair belonging to Leone. Near this wagon, Luke came upon Leone himself. Leone passed Luke with a haughty stride, and as he passed he snapped his fingers and said, "You keep off."

Luke wheeled round. "What you mean?" he said sharply.

Leone, without pausing in his stride, turned his head over his shoulder and snapped his fingers again. "You keep off," he repeated, "that's all."

That night, whilst Otto breathed in placid sleep beside him, and Alf, in the upper bunk, snored and muttered through his dreams, Luke, reclining on one elbow, and with a candle balanced on his crooked knees, wrote his second letter to Elsie.



## XII

MARTA felt in no particular haste to return to Whitfield, and since everybody on the show, and especially Luke, was urgent for her to stay, stay she did, from day to day, and from week to week, and from month to month, moving with Beckett's up through the western counties of England to the lakes, and down through Durham and Yorkshire. When the circus paused for a week's show at Scarborough, she made a half-hearted statement to the effect that it was time for her to be pushing off home. But "What's the hurry?" asked old Sam, who had taken a fancy to her company.

What *was* the hurry? Come to look at it, Marta couldn't really see that there was any. Tenting suited her—and also there was Luke.

"Well, there's the hoss," she said. "He's but hired."

"Send him back by train," said Sam. "We've a-plenty here, doin' nothin'. One of 'em might as well walk atween the shafts of your wagon as anywhere."

So, very early next morning, Luke and Marta took old Steve down to the station and packed him off to Whitfield in a horse box. He looked rather dispirited as, boxed up between the padded partitions, he rolled reproachful eyes at them before the train started. But then, as Marta remarked, what spirit could you expect from a bag of bones that even in his best days had drawn nothing more lively than a hearse? Luke wrote a letter to Mr. Whale, enclosing the money for Steve's hire, and a little extra amount which was the sum owing from Marta for the rent of the old Bell Yard. "Pay as you go," said Marta, "then you can look the devil in the face, if you're unlucky enough to meet him. Eh, Luke, lad, but we're having a grand tenting, you and me!"

Less and less did it seem that there was any hurry to return to Whitfield. Why return ever, for that matter? When Beckett's, having toured the towns of Lincoln and Suffolk and Norfolk and Essex and crossed Tilbury Ferry and shown in Rochester and

Maidstone and Canterbury, when after a highly successful season they found themselves back at Gaythorne, Marta was still with them.

She remained with them for four years, the happiest years that Luke had so far known. He had his "cul" Otto, whose devotion was almost doglike in its gentle and faithful non-assertiveness, he had Marta, he had all the Becketts, with whom he was now on terms of easy familiarity, he had the Lorraines and Checko (he loved them all with an emotion that was none the less deep and genuine if largely unexpressed), he had the animals, whom he was never tired of watching and studying, and he had his work. Always it seemed to him that there was no limit to the exactions of his work, its discipline stretched ahead and ahead of him, calling for greater muscular agility, more perfect balance, keener judgment, more exact precision, more controlled daring, a stricter and ever stricter training of both mind and body; for the goal he had set himself was perfection, and that goal no man has ever reached.

In the second season, since he still refused to assume the name of Castelli, Sam had him billed as Young Lucio. Incomparable Grace and Astounding Agility on the Low-Wire. And at every performance the old rascal stumped into the ring and, with all the force of his powerful lungs, introduced Young Lucio as "a member of a world celebrated fam'ly as *pre-fers* hat present to remain hincog-*nito*." So that romantic young women in the audience, turning their eyes in admiration towards the attractive figure on the wire, wondered whether he was a Russian Prince or a French Count, or even some relation of the Queen herself—or if it was all only gammon and spinach on the part of the old fellow with the red coat and the wooden leg.

But for the perch act Luke remained one of the Two Schillers, because, of course, in a different costume and all that, nobody was supposed to recognize him for the same person.

The circus toured Scotland that year; the next year it toured through Wales and the next crossed over to Ireland. And Sam said "never again," for the crossing was rough and the horses sick and frightened, and when they reached Dublin the elephants, Esmeralda and Daisy, refused to land for a whole day, and might have spent the rest of their lives on shipboard, had not doughty

old Moll, their leader—who, as long as she had Barnaby with her, was equally ready to ascend into Heaven or descend into Hell, or to cross any intermediary territory—at last become so exasperated with her two timid hand-maidens that she attacked them with butting, ear-pulling, tail-twisting, and slaps across the face from her trunk, till she drove them, squealing and half-blinded, down the gangway on to dry land.

No, Sam didn't see the fun of rough sea passages; and Ireland, when you got there, what was it? A land of bad roads and benighted ignorance, where you got stones flung through your wagon windows by heathen rowdies, and had sometimes to keep back by dint of more expert fists and superior muscle a gang of hooligans who thought themselves entitled to enter your show for nothing.

"If I live till Judgment Day," said old Sam, "Beckett's don't visit this durn country never no more."

"I met two jossers at the gate what give me sauce," said his grandchild, Anna, her dark eyes flashing. "So now one's got a black eye and t'other a bleeding nose."

Right, left, Anna had struck out and passed on through the gate, leaving her would-be wooers astonished and discomfited. For Anna at seventeen was beautiful to behold, and carried her head proudly, and was well able to take care of herself.

There was only one person on earth who troubled Anna, and that was Leone.

Up in the dome you would have said that these two were twin souls, with minds so attuned that nothing could ever go amiss between them. And, in a sense, you would have been right. Up in the dome nothing could go amiss, for, during their act, both Anna and Leone were artistes, first and last, and persons not at all. Such an act as theirs demanded complete self-abnegation, an almost subconscious response between one body and another as they swung and somersaulted from their bars and were caught and swung back by Alf. Let their timing be the fraction of a second faulty, let them pause in their rhythm to harbour personal grudges, to indulge in a feeling of annoyance, friction, jealousy, or anger, and the penalty would be an awkward fall into the net, which might mean broken bones, which might mean death. When Anna and Leone went up into the dome they

stripped off their egos as they stripped off the coloured and embroidered wrappers in which they entered the ring; and as they went up clean-limbed and unencumbered, so they went up free as the angels in heaven from any taint of sex consciousness or sex combat.

But, down to earth again, and Leone would preen himself before Anna, the all-conquering male who, in his own estimation, had only to beckon and she would come, only to command, and she would fall down and worship, only to ignore and she would hide herself in secret tears. And Anna, fiercely resenting his attitude, yet alas, only too conscious that it had justification—for was he not beautiful, and was not beauty an all-conquering force?—Anna would clench her hands, and turn her back on him, and walk away, yet carry with her an ever insistent awareness of his face, of his figure, of his soft insolent voice, which try as she would, she could never walk away from; for it seemed closer to her than her own breath, and more intimate than the very beatings of her heart. . . .

"Moppits," said Anna, in her eighteenth year, when she and Luke were out riding together one January afternoon at Gaythorne, "I had a letter from Leone this morning."

Thanks to Luke's teaching, Anna had no longer to come to Luke to have her letters read, or to answer them, either.

"Aye," said Luke, "He's in Paris, isn't he?"

"Yes. Showin' off to the Froggies."

They were trotting leisurely side by side along a flat, tree-bordered road. The bare branches stood out boldly against a yellowing sky, the world smelled sweet and sharp of frost and the approach of evening. "Showin' off—his nibs is always showin' off," said Anna, and with that she gave the skewbald a cut with her riding whip and was off at a gallop along the level and half-way up a steep little hill before Luke overtook her.

The hill road gave on a lane, and at the top of the lane was a grassy flat with a windmill on it. The vanes of the mill turned slowly with a creaking sound under the yellow sky. Luke and Anna pulled up to watch it. Below them the country fell to an already blueing distance, with fields and oast houses, farmsteads and little villages. Lights twinkled in one or two of the farms. "It'll be dark indoors," said Luke.

"Moppits," said Anna, after staring absently at the twinkling lights, "shall I marry Leone?"

"Why yes—if you love him," answered Luke.

"I don't love him, I don't love him," cried Anna passionately. "I hate him!"

"Then of course you can't marry anybody you hate," said Luke.

Anna turned her face to him. Her expression was remote, part contemptuous, part pitying, and altogether incomprehensible to Luke. Then her mouth wavered into a little smile, but there were tears in her eyes. "You don't understand nothin', Moppits," she said. "You don't seem to me but half grown-up."

They rode home slowly and without conversation, each occupied with their own thoughts: Luke meditating the wide issues of love and hate, Anna apparently engrossed in the more passionate issues of her immediate problem.

Sam had worked out a new elephant act for the coming season; none of your everlasting elephant clown tricks that the public knew by heart, but a slap-up elegant number entitled *Elephants and Acrobats*. For his acrobats he selected Luke, Otto, Herman (dressed as a girl), Anna, Flora, and George. They were as good as a troupe of Exotic Tumblers, these six, forming human pyramids and performing various change-overs and contortions up on the elephants' backs. Sam was more pleased with them than he admitted; he planned out a set of handsome costumes with Marta, and had his daughters and his daughters-in-law hard at it cutting out and machining.

Though Leone, with his beautiful body and his extraordinary skill, would have added a grace to this, or any other act, Sam had not asked him to take part in it. Sam had no love for Leone; he kept the young man on from season to season, and also he paid him more than any other artiste, because Leone demanded it and, in a way, deserved it. But Leone was a "Big-head," and his drawling condescension at times made old Sam see red. Leone had no true circus spirit, he was capable of endeavouring to dim any man's light in order to shine more lustrously himself. He ought to have been a play-actor, thought old Sam contemptuously. And should he dare to aspire to the hand of his grand-

child, Anna (oh yes, old Sam's eyes, that missed nothing, had noticed the wind veering towards that quarter) should Leone so dare, then, talent or no talent, Sam would boot him out arse over head. Meantime Leone was a draw and must be put up with.

But all this business of love-making and mating was a durn nuisance, thought Sam, as he stumped off to the orchard to inspect a handsome young tiger he had lately purchased as a mate for Juanita. Not quite such a durn nuisance among animals, because there you could somewhat control it. If you said "no" to Juanita or to Trilby or to Rex or Alexander, and bolstered up your "no" by iron bars, the creatures could not very well say "yes." Though they might, of course, pay you out by turning sulky, or by refusing their food, or even by murdering you one fine day. But with human beings—Sam as he stumped along beat Mo'gany Joe irritably with the riding-switch he carried. Anna was growing up, and after Anna a host of other grandchildren would soon be ripening to the time of love. It would all begin again, the period of turmoil he remembered when his own sons and daughters were young, the agitations, jealousies, storms, ardours and furious scenes in which he had sometimes bawled himself hoarse before he could bawl sense into passionate heads, and get passionate bodies joined up and settled down to the business.

But Leone should not have Anna, of that Sam was determined, for he could not endure the thought of that young pansy-eyes as a son-in-law. Far better for Moppits to have her, he thought, as he caught sight of Luke and Anna standing with Checko by the beast wagons. Moppits was a good, sensible lad, if at times pig-headed, and a Castelli to boot.

"How're they goin'?" he asked, as he joined the group in front of the big double cage that held Juanita and her prospective lord.

Checko smiled and shook his head. "As usual," he answered, "they love not each other."

Juanita sat on her haunches in a corner of the cage. Ears flat, lips bared, her great head turned to one side, she was uttering vicious snarls, for all the world like a tom-cat before he closes with an adversary. In the other compartment, Rajah, with his tail lashing and his claws shining, leaped at the separating bars,

five hundred pounds weight of striped and blazing fury, roaring out his hatred of the insolent female thing in the next cage, with murder, not love, glaring from his amber eyes.

"He's new to her yet," said Sam, "and she ain't on season, nuther."

"And when she is," mused Checko, he lifted deprecating shoulders. "The mating of Juanita and Rajah will be a battle royal," he added, smiling and showing his white teeth.

Sam grunted and stumped off to look at two lion cubs that Checko had prevailed upon him to purchase from a consignment that had lately been shipped to England. Checko fancied forest-bred animals. They were healthier than those born in cages, also they were less sly, and they possessed a respect for man unimpaired by the familiarity which, alas, so often breeds contempt. "They are beautiful," he said softly, as he followed after Sam, "and already they begin to fill out."

Left standing by the tigers' cage with Luke, Anna stood for a while silent, looking from Juanita to Rajah. Then she said: "They're just like us."

"Like *us*?" queried Luke.

"Leone and me, you great booby," said Anna sharply. "I could scratch his eyes out!"

Luke laughed. "Come'n see the cubs?" he suggested.

He had a feeling that Anna did not want to leave him. He often had that feeling nowadays; as if in spirit she were sheltering behind him, hiding from Leone—or was it from herself? She never stayed in Leone's presence for one moment after their work was done, if he sought her out she walked away from him, when he spoke to her she answered him curtly. She hid herself away, sometimes, for hours in her father's wagon, being mightily busy making herself ring costumes; at other times she ordered Luke to go riding with her, and when she had nothing else to fill her time with, she sought Luke, as now, and became preoccupied with whatever preoccupied him. But in all these ways Luke understood that she was singling out Leone for special attention, making him notice her, whether by her marked rudeness to him when present, or by her marked avoidance of his presence. And Leone—damn him—understood it also, it was obvious from the way he watched her out of the corners of his

peat-brown eyes, from the self-satisfaction with which he smiled when she snubbed him, from the very manner in which he spoke her name, as if she were a little wild animal he owned, a little wild animal that, albeit with spits and protests, recognized its master.

As they moved across the orchard Anna said, "D'you believe in fate, Moppits?"

"Yes," said Luke. Then, as the vision of Castelli's Circus rose splendidly to the surface of his mind. "Our lives are all wrote down somewhere," he said with conviction.

"Then it ain't no use fightin'?"

Luke considered. "The fight's wrote down as well," he said.

"You seem mighty sure of it," remarked Anna.

"I *am* sure of it," answered Luke.

Anna seemed about to say something sharp, then she changed her mind. "If you know so much as all that," she said, "then you must be more grown-up than me. Perhaps I didn't ought to have said you wasn't."

"It makes no odds," answered Luke. "I don't give a durn what age you think me."

He spoke quite simply, and he had no intention of annoying Anna, but he did annoy her. "You think too much of yerself," she cried. "All men think too much of themselves. I wish there was nought but women in the world!"

"No you don't."

"How do you know whether I do or don't?"

"Because," said Luke, "you're not made that way."

"You don't know what way I'm made," retorted Anna hotly. "Nobody knows what way I'm made. Not you, nor Leone, nor no one."

There they were back at Leone again! It seemed to Luke that whatever subjects occupied Anna's mind, whether horses, or tigers, or fate, or windmills, or beauty, those subjects were but so many swinging ropes to send her flying back towards Leone.

In front of the lion cages old Sam was talking loudly to Checko. "It's all very fine to praise 'em, but I've been thinking you over-persuaded me to buy them cubs. To hear you talk a circus might



be nort but cats. There's a many too many cats. We can't do with 'em all."

"Then you may sell Isobella's last litter," said Checko. "She breeds too fast and I think they will have fits. But these two I will not part with. I would rather," declared Checko, "part with my right hand than part with these."

### XIII

THAT spring, when Beckett's set out tenting along the Kentish coast, old Sam was not feeling in the best of humours. Why, he couldn't clearly have told you, but it seemed to him that everything was going wrong. True, he had this much justification for his anxiety, there had been insubordination in the elephant tent, on the part of Jim Hanley, Esmeralda's keeper.

Now as, in the ring and out of the ring, Esmeralda's duty was to follow the leading elephant, Moll, so, in the ring and out of the ring, Jim Hanley's duty was to obey the head-keeper, one-armed Barnaby. Esmeralda did not object to playing second fiddle to Moll, indeed she complacently accepted such a position as her destiny in life. But Jim Hanley did resent playing second fiddle to Barnaby. Consequently, as Barnaby put it, he and Jim sometimes "had a few words." This year a few words had occurred at the very beginning of the tenting season. Soon afterwards, as Beckett's were moving southwards, they met a large company of show folk with merry-go-rounds and swing-boats moving northward, and Jim had registered his final disapproval of what he described as "Barnaby's lordly ways" by deserting Esmeralda and joining the swing-boats.

For this occurrence Sam—most irrationally as it seemed to the rest of the company—had blamed Barnaby. Barnaby who had never been robust since the accident that lost him his arm, now brooded and worried and went about with a sick-looking face and a melancholy expression—a fact that did nothing to lessen Sam's annoyance with him.

And the daft part of it was, as Tommy the cheerful pointed out, there was nothing to fret either Sam or Barnaby. For Luke (who had 'a way' with elephants as with all creatures) had immediately offered to give up his comfortable quarters in Alf's wagon and take Jim Hanley's place, until a suitable keeper could be found; and when Esmeralda saw Luke come into the elephant tent and take possession of Jim's vacant bed, she signified her approval by thumping on the ground with her trunk.

"So the pigs is all O.K.," said Tommy, "and neither the Boss nor Barnaby need worrit no more." But Sam did worrit—most irrationally.

"Tisn't as if business wasn't goin' good, neither." Tommy was standing to warm his hands in front of Sam's stove when he said this. Beckett's had been on the road for a week and they had never done better. The money rolled in, and the usually cautious Alfy was all smiles and reckless merriment as he brought each day's takings into Sam's wagon at night.

He was sitting at Sam's table now, under the lamp, arranging silver and copper into neat piles. Lamplight glittered on the piles of silver, and Alfy's dark eyes glittered with them. "Caw!" he exclaimed, "We've done fiddlin' this night. Just you look here!"

Tommy of the stooped back and the bright, handsome face moved over to the table. "Aye, we've begun well," he said. "Looks as if it's goin' to be a rattlin' good season."

"Don't know so much," said old Sam.

Sam was already in bed. He never took supper like the young ones. Presently Roxy, Tommy's wife, would bring him his nightly mug of tea, and then he hoped he would sleep. But Sam had not been sleeping well the last night or two.

"Don't know so much?" echoed Tommy. "Why, look at the spondulicks!"

"Oh, aye, spondulicks is right enough."

"Then what isn't?"

Sam pondered moodily. Nothing seemed right. What was the matter with him? Was he going to be ill that he felt so worried? He sat up in his bunk and stared fiercely at his eldest born, Tommy of the crooked back. "You'll never make no ring-master doubled up as you are," he said. "Nor yet wouldn't Alfy with his tricky knee. It ud have to be Matthew; though he's over soft-spoken for my liking."

"What's wrong with *you*?" asked Tommy in surprise.

Sam didn't know. That was the trouble of it. "May be I'm growing old," he said.

Tommy said, "Don't talk so soft."

Alfy said, "You best take a liver pill."

Roxy came in with Sam's mug of tea. "She's getting stout

and middle-aged," thought Sam, and it was astonishing how such an inevitable fact bothered him. She was his favourite among his son's wives, as her daughter, Anna, was his favourite among his grandchildren. It seemed to him that Roxy, who had been such a magnificent trapeze artiste, had no business to become stout and middle-aged, even though she had produced Anna to take her place.

"Drink up your tea while it's hot, Dad," said Roxy.

She and Tommy went off to bed. Alfy, having put the little piles of silver and coppers into canvas bags and locked them away in Sam's corner cupboard, blew out Sam's light for him, clapped the doors of the stove shut, and limped away. Sam lay watching the glow from under the stove and listening to familiar sounds: the gentle whinny of a horse, the soft thud of wandering hoofs, the high yap of a dreaming dog, the occasional rumble of a voice from one of the wagons, and the irritating laugh of his daughter-in-law, Julia, who always sat up late. No sound from the elephant tent. Yet Sam could not get the thought of his elephants out of his head.

As for that Barnaby—a picture of Barnaby's sick, unhappy face rose most uncomfortably into Sam's mind. What right had the man to go round looking like that? Sam had "spoke hot," but he always did speak hot, Barnaby ought to know better than to take hot words so much to heart. . . .

It seemed to Sam it was hours before he slept, and then, in a dream, Mamma Beckett came to him.

"So now we're together again, Dad," said Mamma Beckett in her husky voice. "But I'm sorry about Moll."

"Moll? Esmeralda you mean." Sam woke himself up saying these words.

Well, well, what a foolish old Rum-Cul, worriting himself about his elephants and his dreams with business going so merrily! Sam tried to reason with himself. But what is the good of reasoning? Reason is a cheat. If you feel something is wrong, then something must be wrong. Sam, though he was not in the habit of defining his convictions, and therefore had never arrived at Luke's conclusion that "our lives are all wrote down somewhere," yet believed, as whole-heartedly as Luke himself, in Fate. Moreover, whenever, whether in dream or in waking vision, Sam had sensed

the shadow of coming events—and that, during his long life was not infrequently—then sure enough those events had come to pass. How often through the years when mishap had occurred—a trainer mauled or an acrobat killed—had Sam been able to say to himself, “aye, I knew it”! Only the trouble about it was that, since a shadow is but a shadow, a man could not, until the event had come to pass, know what it was that he had known. Were it not for this nuisance fact, a man would be a god, defying Fate. . . . So thought Sam as he got out of his bunk and buckled on Mo’gany Joe. The shadow was still dark on his mind, and yet he could not tell what event was shadowed there, except that it had something to do with elephants.

That morning Beckett’s made an early start. The sky was cloudless and the dew heavy. Trees and fields, farms and thickets were showing greyly in the dawning light as Sam, last to leave the field, drove his wagon along a high level stretch of gravelly road. Birds sang, softly and uncertainly as yet, first a thrush, then a blackbird, then a chaffinch; light increased and with it increased the songs of the birds, so that the growing of dawn was apparent both to eye and ear. Clearer and ever clearer to see, as Sam drove along, were the trees and the fields, the farms and the thickets, clearer and ever clearer to hear the chorus of birds, until, as the sun rose, the whole world, from the budding thickets by the roadside, past the dew-sparkling fields and the shining woods to the calm distant sea, lay glittering before Sam’s eyes; whilst in his ears rang pæan after pæan, birds answering birds from the near-by thickets, over the fields to the farthest wood: a torrent of light, a tumult of song, both from small beginnings now spread across the earth.

“There’s nought wrong with the morning, at any rate,” thought Sam, who had pulled up the better to appreciate this dual splendour of sunrise.

Sam was some way behind the rest of his company that morning. The “tober omeiy” hadn’t come for his rent the night before, and Sam had had to drive round by his house and get him out of bed by repeated and thunderous knockings on his door, in order to pay it. But Sam wasn’t hurrying. It was early, and he didn’t believe in fretting the horses; by the time he reached

the next pitch he hoped to see the king poles in place and all hands busy at the lacing.

"Kim y-yip!" Sam spoke softly and twitched on the reins, the three big piebalds started forward, golden beams of light shone into Sam's eyes. He pulled his bowler hat over his brows and smiled grimly. Past a farm, where no one was yet astir, past a couple of conical roofed oast houses, past an orchard, round a bend, and down a little hill. What was this? As Sam rounded the bend he saw, on the stretch of the road below him, wagons, lorries, horses, elephants, men, women, children, dogs, his entire circus at a standstill. At the head of the long line of wagons, the humped grey backs of his elephants rose one behind the other, not motionless but rolling like anchored ships on a rough sea; at the rear of the wagons, the beast cages with their ornamental gilt tops gleamed in the sun's rays.

"What the hell—!" Sam, urging the piebalds into a smart canter which set the wagon careening down hill, saw his son, George, galloping up hill to meet him.

"Something's took Barnaby," shouted George. "He've fell in a faint and Moll's stood over him and won't let none come nigh."

Sam, arriving at the bottom of the hill, swung himself down from the driving seat and dubbed his company, indiscriminately, a lousy lot of bastards. Then he pushed his way through the *mêlée* of horses and wagons to the front, where Barnaby lay on the grass verge with closed eyes. Moll had swung the bulk of her body across the road; with the tip of her trunk she was lightly feeling her unconscious master, caressing now his face, now his body, blowing warm moist breaths into his curled palm. Behind her Esmeralda and Daisy, the one guarded by Luke, the other by Dan Blewett, the third elephant man, rolled their eyes and rocked uneasily. Esmeralda's big ears were lifted, Daisy was whimpering and wrinkling her skin. Luke and Dan talked to them incessantly, but they were frightened. What was the matter with Moll? Why didn't she get a move on? Without Moll's leadership they were two helpless children, scared of every sight, of every sound.

When Moll saw Sam approach and stoop over Barnaby, her little eyes reddened, and her trunk swung round. Whang! She

gave him a buffet across the shoulders that sent him staggering.

"Brandy!" bawled Sam. "Two bottles of it, an' a pail!"

Tommy and Jack came with the brandy, Herman ran with the pail.

"An' water, you bloody fools," shouted Sam, "an' a cup!"

Sarah brought a cup and a pitcher of water. Sam filled the pail half-full of water and emptied into it the contents of one brandy bottle. Moll watched him, her trunk wavered from Barnaby towards the fragrance rising from the pail. Sam poured brandy into the cup and added a little water, he held out the cup and pail to the inquiring trunk.

"This here in the pail is for you, you stupid pig," he said.

"And this here in the cup is for Barnaby."

Moll considered, rolling uneasily from foot to foot, then she lowered her trunk into the pail. On the instant Sam stooped, lifted Barnaby's head and forced the cup between his teeth. Moll filled her trunk and drank, Barnaby sighed and opened his eyes.

"What's wrong?" demanded Sam.

"Me chest," gasped Barnaby. "I've been feelin'—anxious like since Jim Hanley left—and then—walkin'—I—"

"Can you stand?" interrupted Sam.

Barnaby grinned feebly. Tommy and Jack pulled him to his feet. His face was ashy pale, sweat broke out on his forehead, as he swayed between Tommy and Jack.

"Hey! No more faintin'," bawled Sam angrily. "Your elephant, man, she's sore. Speak to her, can't you?"

"Moll," muttered Barnaby. "'S'all right, Moll . . . Oh Lord God," he groaned, "I feel ter'ble."

"Terrible or no, you'll have to wait till Moll's safe picketed," said Sam unfeelingly. "You can't die by the roadside and leave her."

Moll had emptied the pail. Reassured by Barnaby's voice, she stood waiting till he should tell her what to do next. Seeing her through a haze of anxiety, for if that pain in his breast bone came again he felt certain he would die, Barnaby put a trembling hand on Moll's trunk and told her just to stand quiet. She stood quiet, whilst Sam, shouting orders, had the swan carriage taken down from one of the lorries, padded with cushions and brought round in front of Moll, with two ponies harnessed to it.

"Lift him up and lay him flat," said Sam. "Easy now, may be he's broke summat, but if he can't walk he can ride. 'Ere, Jack, you foot it by the ponies, carry the bottle in your pocket and turn your eye to him, now and again. Fairly comfortable in there, are you?" (Barnaby nodded.) "Then get a move on, everybody!"

So the company moved on again, the swan carriage jerking in front with Barnaby, who set his teeth against the jolting of the wheels and tried to think of far-away pleasant things—the time when he was a kid—anything, rather than remember that awful pain in his chest and the terrible feeling of suffocation. Behind the swan carriage, Moll, stepping demurely, her eyes on her master's dark head which, from her superior height, she could see propped on a cushion beyond the curved wooden tail of the swan. Behind Moll, Esmeralda, behind Esmeralda, Daisy, both complacently assured that all was well so long as Moll moved on ahead of them: and behind Daisy, the long procession of horses, wagons and lorries.

It was not until the new pitch was reached, the elephant tent erected, and Moll securely chained hind and fore to stout iron stakes, that Sam sent Tommy galloping for a doctor. When the doctor arrived he said that Barnaby had had an attack of angina, and ordered him to be instantly removed, for at least a day or two's rest and quiet, to a near-by cottage hospital.

"Then Moll stays chained up and don't work in the ring, this day," said Sam.

"And to-morrow?" queried Alfy.

"Leave to-morrow be until to-morrow come," retorted Sam, and stumped off to superintend the erection of the big-top.

Didn't he know it? Hadn't he foreseen it? And it wasn't done with yet, if Sam knew anything about elephants. If he couldn't get Barnaby out of hospital to-morrow the circus would have to stay where it was, and risk another show on the same tober. If Barnaby kicked the bucket, then, maybe, Moll would run amok and have to be destroyed. "I'm sorry about Moll," that's what Mamma Beckett had said in his dream. Aye, there was going to be more trouble, old Sam braced himself to meet it by bawling and cursing; nobody, it seemed, could do anything



right, nobody could please him, they were dolts, fools, bastards, swines, all the lot of them.

"Old man's narked," observed George to Matthew, as they crouched side by side lacing the quarters.

"So would you be," said Matthew the soft-hearted. "It's a Jonah trip we've took to-day, to my thinking."

"There'll be no parade," shouted Sam, stamping past them. "Tommy, Alf, Dolf, Herman and Cyrus'll ride the prads up-town, and that's all."

In the elephant tent, Moll, chained hind and fore, lifted her trunk and trumpeted for Barnaby. Luke offered her a hunk of cake that Anna had given him, Dan Blewett offered her the contents of his tobacco pouch, she flung their offerings from her like a naughty child. Sam, whose wagon, contrary to custom, had been pulled in close to the elephant tent, came to the entrance of the tent and stared at Moll.

Moll's trunk weaved from side to side, she eyed Sam and gave a sharp imperative shriek. "I want Barnaby," that's what she said. Sam frowned and shook his head. Moll, swinging her trunk, gave shriek after shriek, her eyes grew cloudy with anger. It seemed to her that Sam was responsible for Barnaby's disappearance; she had not forgotten that Sam had persuaded her to drink out of a pail. It seemed to her that she had been tricked into giving up her guard over her beloved master.

"It ain't no good you're makin' a fuss," said Sam. "When misfortune comes you've got to put up with it, same as we all have."

But Moll didn't want to put up with it. All through the morning she weaved and trumpeted, rolled her body from side to side, shrieked for Barnaby and slapped at Luke and Dan Blewett when they tried to comfort her. Meantime, out in the field, the usual bustle was going on, the big-top and the horse tent put up, the horses groomed, fed and watered, the beast wagons cleaned out.

Then, as Sam had ordered, Tommy, Alf, Dolf, Herman and Cyrus dressed themselves up and rode some of the horses through the town, distributing handbills as they went, and the rest of the company, thanking heaven for no parade, lay down and slept. The horses came back, dinner time came, the canteen was

busy. Moll still rocked and fidgeted and called for Barnaby, Dan Blewett went off and bought dinner for himself and Luke, and they sat side by side on Luke's bed and ate it, watching the unhappy Moll.

"So long as she don't start the other two goin' as well," said Dan with his mouth full.

The time for the day show drew near, and people from the town sauntered into the field; they wandered round the beast wagons, peeped into the horse tent, fed the monkeys with nuts and biscuits. Dan, having hurriedly put on his smart uniform, of blue and buff with silver buttons, stationed himself outside the entrance to the elephant tent. "Elephants ain't on show to-day," he repeated to every one who came near.

Luke came out of the tent to go to Alf's wagon for his ring clothes and make-up. "I won't be a jiff," he said to Dan, "I'll fetch 'em across and dress here."

Dan watched him stride across the field. There was no one now, thanks be, poking round, trying to get a squint at the elephants. The townsfolk were flocking towards the big-top. The bandsmen had gone up on to the show front, and also some of the children, Susannah and Henry, Bella and little Wilhelmina waiting to do their step dance. Alphonse went up with a handful of knives, followed by Cyrus, leading the pony, Dolly, with her red plume nodding above her saucy little head. The Boss, nicely shaved, wearing his red coat and drawing on his white gloves, was coming carefully down the steps of the nearest wagon. And that Moppits had just gone up the steps of the farthest wagon and in through the door; queer cove, Moppits, no proper pride in him, as you might say, turning elephant man, or anything else that was required. "If I could do ring work, now," thought Dan, "you wouldn't catch me——"

Rattle! Snap! A jingling sound behind him made Dan swing round, to see Moll's big domed head pushed through the tent entrance. With some idea of urging her back Dan flung up his arms. The next instant he was seized in Moll's trunk and whirled through the air, to fall crashing into unconsciousness against the steps of Sam's wagon.

He fell almost at Sam's feet. Sam gave a great shout but did not stop to pick him up—there was something more urgent to be

done. At a hobbling run he advanced to meet Moll who, half in and half out of the elephant tent, was trumpeting for Barnaby.

She had broken the chain on her fore foot, she had pulled up the stake that secured the chain round her hind foot, now chain and stake were caught against one of the tent poles. Moll tugged, the tent pole rocked, and from within came the squeals of Esmeralda and Daisy, alarmed at this strange behaviour on the part of their leader.

"Back up! Back up!" roared Sam, hopping out of reach of Moll's swinging trunk. Crack! there went the tent pole, the tent roof sagged down on to Moll's heaving back. Esmeralda trumpeted, Daisy trumpeted, there was the sound of dragging stakes and splitting canvas. "*Back up! Tom! Alf! Back up! Matthew! George!*" Bloody Hell, were they all asleep? Why didn't they come?

They did come, they were running full tilt, some in their ring clothes, some half dressed, but they came too late. As Sam, in a last desperate effort to stay Moll's progress hurled himself against her, Mo'gany Joe slipped on the dry grass, Sam went down sprawling, Moll pushed her way out of the tent, Sam from the ground clutched at her uplifted foot. "Oh no, Rum-Cul, you don't trick me again!" The uplifted foot came down and stamped heavily on Sam's chest. Then Moll swung away across the field.

All Sam's sons stooped over him as he lay on the ground, gasping and spitting blood. Esmeralda swung past, Daisy swung past, nobody heeded them, except old Sam. "You bastards, round up them ele—" The rest of the sentence was choked in the blood that poured from his mouth. . . .

The people waiting in front of the big-top scattered in all directions as Moll shuffled noiselessly across the field. Not seeing Barnaby anywhere she made for the barbed wire fence, crashed her way through it and out on to the road. Esmeralda and Daisy followed. Strands of broken wire wound themselves round Esmeralda's leg, tearing the flesh. "Moll! Moll!" Esmeralda trumpeted. "Where are you off to in this crazy manner, when elephants ought to be getting ready to enter the ring? Moll! Moll!"

Somebody came leaping, caught Esmeralda's ear and vaulted on to her shoulders.

"Hey up! Hey up!" That was Moppitts' voice, so everything must be all right after all, thought Esmeralda. It was some sort of new act, was it, this running out into the road instead of round the ring? Hey up! that was what they said when they wanted you to run fast. Very well, here goes—"Oh, my poor leg!" Esmeralda whimpered, wrenched her leg free of the wire, charged down into a ditch, and up again with Daisy at her heels. Ahead of them, on a long straight road bordered by small houses, Moll was going at a fine pace, making for the town. "After her!" called Luke to Esmeralda, "Hey up! Hey up!"

Esmeralda's great shoulders rolled him like a sack from side to side, as she set off in hot pursuit of her leader.

"Round up them elephants!" That's what the Boss had said. You obeyed the Boss, never mind what happened—that was "circus" the only thing to do. Was the Boss going to die—God, don't think of it, don't remember what he looked like with his chest smashed and the blood—"round up them elephants!" Plenty to see to the Boss, no one to see to the elephants, except me. See to 'em! How? I don't know. Here I am rolling about on Esmeralda. *Hey up*, Esmeralda . . . Some kids in the road, hey! hey! Out of the way! Near shave for that girl . . . People at their doors, people shouting and screaming, people running, a rozzar at the corner—bolted—what else to do? Moll turning into the high street, a horse crashing a grocer's van into a shop front, on we go, everybody running, an ice cream cart overturned. *Hey up! Esmeralda!* . . . Close on Moll now. *Tails, Esmeralda!* Aye, she's got it, that'll quieten Moll . . . *Tails, Daisy!* Here we go spankin' all in a line. There's a crossin' comin'. If I were on Moll's back now, like on parades. Could I make it? Of course—I *can do anything, me!* Done it in the ring, often. Here goes then, but quick's lightnin', or I'm off. One to be up, two to leap, *three!* Almost in one continuous movement, Luke drew up his feet, crouched on Esmeralda's rolling shoulders, poised himself one instant erect, pitching and tossing like a mariner at the mast head, leaped and landed on Moll's back. Moll, feeling the alien weight, shook herself so violently that Luke fell flat across her backbone, grazing his face and hands on her rough hide, but he clung on, wriggled nearer

to her head, got into a sitting position on her shoulders and shouted "Moll!"

That's better, she's recognized me. *Hey up! Moll, hey up!* Keep her goin' till she forgets she ain't obeying orders, make her think she's runnin' 'cause I tell her to. *Hey up, Moll, faster, Moll!* Here's the crossin'. I'll try it. *Right turn, Moll!* She's done it, she's obeyed, keep on givin' her orders, make her think she's on parade—some parade this—worth watchin'! Work her round gradual to the tober. *Steady there, Moll, steady, gal, steady!* That's the ticket, she's slowin' down, she's comin' to her senses. Here we go, shufflin' along quite orderly. *Right turn again, Moll! . . .*

In his wagon Sam opened his eyes and gazed in bewilderment. The wagon was crowded with people: Jack in his baggy comedy trousers, the top half of his body naked, the grease paint in thick, disorderly patches on his face: Alfie in his spangled tights, Matthew in his vest and trousers, George in his pants, Norman with his false forehead and clown's wig all awry on his head, old Marta Castelli, too—what's she doing in my wagon?—and a man in a black coat whom Sam had already seen that day: Tommy with his dark hair greased but not combed back—Sam frowned—the girls, some in wrappers, some in ring clothes, some with their hair hanging down their backs, Roxy with her arm under his head and her big bosom heaving. What's the matter with 'em all? Who's that blubbering? Oh, so I'm damaged, am I? Sam remembered. "Them elephants?" he said, and was surprised that his great voice sounded only in a whisper.

"Moppits just brought 'em in," answered Tommy huskily.

Sam smiled. "Good lad—Moppits," he mumbled. His eyes closed. Every one had gone now, except Mamma Beckett, who was close and comfortable. Her arm was under his head and her big breasts pillowed him as in the old days. "Now we can get some sleep, Dad," said Mamma Beckett. "Show's over and done."

No, by God, but it ain't! Lad-ies *and* gentlemen, the show is about to *com-mence!* Sam opened his eyes wide and saw his red coat hanging on a peg. There was mud on it, and dark stains. Matthew? Look at that boob with the tears running

down his cheeks! Sam struggled up from Roxy's embracing arm. His great chest heaved under its restricting bandages. His deep-set blue eyes blazed wrathfully on Matthew. "What you—snivellin' there—for?" he demanded in a voice that came in gasps, yet was loud enough to set the ornaments on the mantle-shelf tinkling. "Get—into that—red coat! Blood and dam—nation—do you mean to keep—the public—waitin'?"

Then he groaned and fell back. The doctor pushed his sons aside and stooped over him, and Roxy, who was his favourite amongst his sons' wives, pressed her full soft lips to his cheek.

Tommy whispered to Alf. Alf jerked his head to Matthew. "Stow it and come outside," said Alf. "But you can't wear that coat."

Tommy, Alf and Matthew went down the wagon steps and elbowed their way through the enormous crowd that had collected in the field.

Tommy, of the crouched back, mounted the show front and began to bawl. "Lad-ies *and* gentlemen! The show is about to *com-mence*! Walk up, walk up, for the greatest show on earth! See the bear *what* wrestles with the famous *ex-plorer*, Cap'n Pycroft! See the liberty hosses as has *per-formed* afore the crowned heads of *Eu-rope*, see the forest bred lions——"

"But there's been somebody killed, hasn't there?" asked a woman, uneasily.

"A bit of an accident like, nothing to signify," answered Alf. "Oh yes, the man's quite comfortable, doctor's seein' to him, accident was a pure one, elephant just bowled him over, didn't mean no harm, gentle as a baby, she is——"

"Walk up, walk up!" bawled Tommy.

The bands reassembled on the show front, they blew into their brazen instruments and drowned the sound of Tommy's bawling voice. Susannah, Bella, Henry and little Wilhelmina began their step-dance, Alphonse juggled his knives, Cyrus put the pony Dolly through her paces, Herman, in his clown's dress, leaped on to the platform and began turning somersaults. Dolf and Andrew fired guns and cracked whips, and, in his wagon, Matthew dipped his head in a bucket of water and wept and washed away his tears, whilst his wife, Hester, rummaged in a

chest for a black swallow-tailed coat, and shook it vigorously to shake out the creases.

On with the show! On with the show! In the Boss's wagon lies the body of old Sam, trampled by an elephant. Showman's luck, showman's wages. Old Sam has gone to join Mamma Beckett, he died as he lived, game to the last, thinking of his public. "Do you mean to keep the public waitin'?" No, Boss, we don't. The show goes on whatever happens—you have taught us that. Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, walk up! Look and laugh, look and marvel, the clowns and the acrobats are ready, they will amuse you to-day as they amused you yesterday, you will not be disappointed, there is a new ring-master, and he wears a black coat because the red one is soiled, that is the only difference, he is strutting and smiling and cracking wheezes with the clowns. The clowns excel themselves, they are extraordinarily funny, and what a happy, handsome set of acrobats—see, every one is smiling! Oh aye, good people, there is nought amiss with us circus folk. Unfeeling says you? But our private feelings are our own affair. We smile when we have stomach ache, we smile when we break our backs, we smile when the best Rum-Cul that ever breathed lies dead. On with the show, on with the show, on with the show!

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## XIV

NEXT Sunday, very early, at an hour when normally Beckett's would be resting from the week's toil, a grand parade wound its way out through the gates of the circus field. It was the very grandest parade that Beckett's had ever turned out, though, at that early hour on a Sunday morning, there was none to watch it. Twenty piebalds, whose muscles rippled under their groomed and satiny coats, drew the Britannia carriage, in which sat Anna, throned and helmeted, with old Cæsar at her feet. Tunic clad cupids, shivering a little, for the morning was yet chill, with rosy wings and garlanded heads, surrounded her, and at her back the bandsmen in their red coats struck up a lively music. Behind the Britannia carriage came a light lorry, decorated with flags and drawn by the Lippizana, Punch, that dignified stallion who had carried Sam on his back for more than twenty years. Punch had a bright blue plume on his head, and blue harness on his back; spread over the lorry was a blue cloth, winking richly with gold and silver sequins, and under the cloth lay Sam in his coffin. Sam was dressed in his ring-master's coat, which Roxy had washed and mended, and under the coat, on his left arm, was a circlet of dusky hair. Sam's hands were folded on his breast, and between his hands was a framed photograph of Mamma Beckett. His head rested on a red velvet pillow; on one side of the pillow was Mamma Beckett's gold watch, and on the other side her coral comb and her marriage lines. Behind the cart walked the three shining draught-horses, whose duty, until now, it had been to draw Sam's living wagon. They, too, wore blue plumes on their heads, and blue trappings on their backs. Behind Sam's horses followed the entire circus company of men and women, children and babies and animals. Each acrobat was dressed in the ring costume that most became him, each clown wore his merriest make-up, each child and baby was garlanded, each horse was plumed and caparisoned in red or green or silver or gold or blue. Old Marta was there, riding sedately on the white Marguerita; the folds of her flowered silk gown



belled out over the side-saddle, her high kid boots gleamed softly from the polish she had given them, her gloved hands held the reins elegantly, and Marcellin's famous green plume nodded from the big black hat set on her high-piled curls. Barnaby was there, for who could rest in hospital on such an occasion? He was not walking; Barnaby, by order of his new Boss, Tommy Beckett, was never to walk the roads again. He rode a sorrel rosin-back at Moll's side. Moll herself, totally unconscious of the trouble she had caused, stepping demure and complacent, and closely followed by her faithful handmaidens, Esmeralda and Daisy; all three of them with their toe nails gilded, red velvet head-dresses with long golden fringes, and red and gold cloths strapped across their humped grey backs. Dan Blewett was there, in his smart uniform of blue-and-buff, one sleeve dangling, and his coat, with its polished silver buttons, hiding his splinted arm. Luke was there in his blue-and-rose Spanish costume, with the red toreador hat. They were all there, not a dog, not a monkey, not a big cat, nor a little animal from the novelty tent was left behind on the tober, where the wagons stood locked and empty about the big-top, whose wallings flapped gently in the dawn wind, and whose two Union Jacks fluttered out and drooped again as the breeze frolicked.

So, with his spirited band going before and his gay company following behind, old Sam travelled to his grave through empty roads made beautiful by the blossoming spring and melodious with the voices of many birds. Miles upon miles; miles upon miles; coloured plumes nodded, coloured garments fluttered, silver bits jingled, silver stirrups flashed, slow hoofs stirred up a moving cloud of dust. The bandsmen's instruments glittered golden in the rising sun, the bandsmen's cheeks ached with their continual playing, babies were given the breast and fell asleep, the little cupids, the paper flowers vibrating on their curled heads, stood up bravely, though their shoulders were aching under the rosy wings.

By and by, as the parade passed through villages, people came to their gates and stood bareheaded. You might deceive the public for one night, but you could not keep death a secret for ever, the news had spread through the county, and the flatties knew well enough what was due to the dead, even though these

circus people chose to have their heathen funeral procession headed by a band that blared out such inappropriate music. So—off with your hats, boys, show a bit of proper respect!

In one village the bells were ringing for church; the notes of the bells and the notes of the band mingled wildly together in a triumphant jangle that sounded like some pagan marriage festival.

So the procession arrived at the graveyard where Mamma Beckett slept under the two marble angels, and where a rather bewildered young clergyman in a white stole strode forward to meet it. And, whilst the horses, the lions, the elephants, the dogs, and the monkeys halted by the roadside, Sam's coffin, under its sequined pall, was lifted down from the cart and carried by his sons into the graveyard and lowered into the grave.

Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, and the undaunted spirit at rest after its long travelling.

"And you said as how it would be a rattlin' good season," said Alfie to Tommy, "but he knew better. We're goin' to find him wantin', Tommy."

"Aye," answered Tommy, "we're goin' to miss him bad."

## X V

THEY did "miss him bad"; not only because they had loved and respected old Sam but because, as they all realized more and more acutely as the weeks passed, his had been the vigorous guiding spirit that had kept their fiery personalities in hand; welding their disagreements into a unity that set the good of Beckett's before all private quarrels, refusing to accept the whims and passions of highly strung nerves and overworked bodies as anything but whims and passions, roaring them into silence when they bickered, ever holding before them an ideal of altruism and faithful service and high endeavour, forcing them to realise that separately they would be but so many broken limbs, who, together, were an entity, a cosmos, a creation, a living, moving, self-sufficing world.

Now he was gone: the little kingdom on wheels had lost its king; the entity, its directing brain. Tommy, as eldest son, did his best. But, where all brothers have been equal, what brother will accept another's government? Alfie had his opinions which differed from Tommy's: Jack and George also had theirs. The brothers-in-law begged to disagree on many a point of policy and management, the wives took sides with their husbands; and Matthew, the gentle, who knew, so it seemed to him, better than any of them what his wise old Dad would have counselled, had not force of character enough to make such counsel heard amid the passionate clamour of so many opposing voices.

"There's too many bosses on this show," said Matthew sorrowfully, "Beckett's is like a wagon runnin' down hill with every one shoutin'."

"Too many bosses, a durn sight too many bosses!" bawled Jack, flashing dark eyes on the argument-heated Tommy.

"Aye, too many bosses," echoed the glittering Alfie, setting his thin lips together.

"Too many bosses, I'm fair sick of it!" yelled George.

"Too many bosses, and who's to blame for that?" thundered Tommy. "My God! I should think there was too many bosses!"

It seemed the only point on which they could agree.

Quarrelling is an infectious pastime, and example a growth that burgeons downwards from the rulers to the ruled. The lack of unity in the wagons descended to the tents, the hands sulked, grumbled and shirked, they complained of the weather, of the food, of the early rising, of their lack of sleep, and the general hardness of their lot. There were days when Beckett's was late in shifting and late in arriving, days when all thought of parade had to be abandoned, when the big-top was scarcely up in time for the day show, when the horses went into the ring ungroomed. Walter Orde, on being bullied by Alfie over this circumstance, became impudent; and, on being asked if he wanted Alfie's fist in his eye, responded with alacrity that, before that happened, Alfie would find his, Walter Orde's, fist in his own eye.

Walter Orde was given the sack by Alfie, the dismissal was rescinded by Tommy, renewed by Jack. Whilst the brothers quarrelled over what should be done about him, and the brothers-in-law added their conflicting opinions to the argument, Walter Orde took matters into his own hands, and departed. And, since no one efficient could be found to take his place, there was extra work for everybody, and muddle where order had reigned supreme for the past fifteen years.

Leone alone of all the company was unaffected by the confusion. It pleased him to behave as if matters were entirely normal. One might almost think that it gave him a secret satisfaction to appear unaware of the hubbub that surrounded him.

With all this internal conflict going on, the reputation of Beckett's began to suffer. The tour of the south coast, which old Sam had planned as a triumphal progress, with Beckett's at the top of its form, drawing huge crowds in all the larger watering places, looked as if it were destined to become a dismal failure. There were empty benches and lean takings. The circus was obliged to change its route and confine itself to the small towns, not being able to afford the heavy rents demanded of it in fashionable places. For this catastrophe Tommy blamed Alfie, Alfie blamed Matthew, Matthew blamed nobody, but shook his head dolefully, and Jack, George, Cyrus, Norman, Dolf and Andrew were loud in their complaints against each other.

Tempers rose to striking point, dark eyes and blue eyes flashed murderously, fists were clenched.

"Eh, lad," said old Marta to Luke, "I've lived too long when circus folk fall out like common flatties. Mayhap I'd best push off home again."

"No, Gran'an," urged Luke, "don't go, don't go and leave me!"

It seemed to Luke that his glorious world was crashing about his ears. This "circus"! It was chaos, pandemonium! Who could have believed that lofty ideals could so collapse, that art and skill, beauty and high endeavour could be so dragged down and trampled on by petty misunderstandings and disputes that didn't matter a durn? He longed to cut away from it all and start afresh, but loyalty forbade him.

One day, Checko went into his wagon, unlocked his strong-box and counted the savings of twenty-five years. The same night he came to Tommy after the pull-down. "I should like to leave you," he said, "if you will sell me all the cats."

"Sell you the—? Bloody Moses, I'll see you jugged first!" exclaimed Tommy. "Do you forget you're under contract?"

"No, I do not forget."

"Then go to hell," shouted Tommy, "you and your damn' cats."

"I think they cannot work where all is in a disturbance," said Checko quietly. "I do my best, but their tempers become ruffled."

This may have been imagination on Checko's part, but, if the tempers of the cats were not ruffled, the tempers of the human beings were sadly so, and it is certain that the animals grew depressed and did not work so well, lacking the encouragement of full benches and the thunderous applause that had, until now, rewarded their efforts. Moll, especially became dispirited and refused to give of her best, and Esmeralda and Daisy faithfully followed her example in this, as in all other matters. Barnaby worried so much that he was repeatedly threatened with recurrences of his heart trouble, and carried a bottle of nitrate of amyl with him even into the ring.

"It'll be the death of me," he groaned to Dan Blewett. "Why cain't they pull together? Don't they know that my life's

at their mercy, and theirs at the mercy of old Moll? Oh Lord God, why cain't they stop it, afore sommut ter'ble happens?"

To which Dan, who was a philosopher in his humble way, replied that what was going to happen, would happen, and it wasn't no bloody use getting worked up about it.

A new trouble occurred in the defection of the band. Business was so bad that wages had to be reduced. One Saturday in August, on receiving their weekly pay, docked of some shillings, the bandsmen played discords through two performances, were "told off" savagely by every male member of the Beckett family and by most of the women, and, after the pull-down held an indignation meeting in their tent. On Monday morning George went stamping up the steps into Tommy's wagon. "See what you've done now," he shouted, "the band's scarpered!"

Tommy put the blame on Alfie for suggesting a reduction of wages, and he and Alfie had a set-to with their fists, which resulted in Beckett's arriving later than ever at their next pitch. When it was discovered that the band had not only scarpered, but taken their uniforms with them, together with various stores from the canteen and such other trifles as they could lay their hands on, indignation became so clamorous that nobody knew who first to blame.

That night Marta stood at the door of her wagon, frowning and narrowing her eyes at the serene stars. It seemed to her that Beckett's, like a wheel with a broken hub, was liable to fly to pieces at any moment. "It can't go on," thought Marta, shaking her head at the stars, "not without order, it can't. There's order up yonder, ain't there? Well, then, so there must be down below."

Then she had an idea. She determinedly descended the steps of her wagon and as determinedly ascended the steps of Tommy Beckett's and rapped on the door.

Roxy opened it. Tommy was across at Jack's. "Having another row," said Roxy sadly.

"See here, missus," said Marta, "this can't go on."

"Oh," exclaimed Roxy, clasping her plump hands, "it's enough to make Dad turn in his grave! And that Tommy, well, you know what a brick he once were. Now he's that ugly-tempered I can't do nothing by him."

"I've been thinking," said Marta, "Beckett's must divide up."

"Div-ide?" Roxy opened her brown eyes wide in astonishment. "Beckett's *divide*?"

"Aye," said Marta firmly, "divide up, my lass, afore it cracks up. Let Tommy go his way, and Alfy go his way, and all the rest of 'em go their ways. Then there'll be peace on earth again."

"But Beckett's," gasped Roxy, "ain't never divided!"

"Nor the Boss ain't never died afore this," said Marta. "But he's done it now, more's the pity."

Roxy wiped tears from her eyes, and Marta remarked brusquely that crying didn't help any. "I'm putting it to Tommy afore I sleep this night," she said. "Better each cock crowing on his own dunghill than ten cocks fightin' in one yard, and better a many small tidy shows than one big untidy failure."

"There's something in what you say," agreed Roxy, blowing her nose.

"There ought to be," said Marta. "I ain't lived all these years for nothin'."

"But I don't expect Tommy'll think of it," said Roxy. "Nor yet the others."

"Then they're even bigger fools than I took 'em for," answered Marta sharply. "And that's saying a deal."

Tommy came in with a black eye, and that was George's doing. (George was at that minute having a bruised cheek bathed by Julia and relieving his feelings by cursing Tommy.) Marta said, "You're goin' to the devil, you boys is." And Tommy said, "Hell, don't I know it!" So then Marta put her proposition to him and Tommy exclaimed, "Christ! Why didn't I think of that afore?" He dashed out to put it to Alfy. Alfy said, "I calc'late the old dona's about right," and limped off to put it to George. George, tenderly pinching his bruised cheek, said "That nothing would give him greater satisfaction than that he and that swine, Tommy, should part company." He hurried off to put it to Matthew. Matthew said, "Anything for a quiet life," and went to tell Jack. Jack said, "So long's the rest of you's agreeable, I am, for by God, I'd sooner be dead than go on like this 'ere. An' if that bastard Norman don't see reason

I'll lam it into him with me bloody fists, for 'tain't his show and never was, for all his barnumizing. He ain't got a gag nor a wheeze that wasn't stale when the ark was built, yet he's the bloody cheek to expect me to play Auguste to his Joey!"

But Norman did see reason. He could work with Moomoo, he said, and he could work with Herman, but he'd be beggared if he could work with that nigger-driver Jack. Dolf, Andrew and Cyrus saw reason also, for each one was persuaded that he alone knew how to run a show, and that the sooner the rest of them cleared out and left him to run it, the better. And this was the second point on which all the brothers and the brothers-in-law found themselves in agreement.

So next day, after the matinée, Marta invited them all to tea in her wagon, and reminded them how the great Lord George had behaved, when he found himself in a similar predicament. "When everything was valued, he and his brother, John, tossed a shilling for each article," she said, and he who won the toss took the goods and paid over half the value to t'other, or handed over the goods and took the half-value, just which he preferred; and so they tossed in turn, till all was divided."

"But there's nine of us boys," objected Norman.

"No odds for that," said Marta. "We can work it the same way, only different, as Moomoo says. You can pick in turn, drawing lots for the order you'll pick in, and the squivalence can be paid over in eight equal portions. No, in nine portions; for Sarah, though she's never married, has worked as hard as the rest of you, and has a right to her share of the dibs. And I'll stand by to see as all is done reg'lar, but if there's any fightin', I leave you to yourselves."

There was no fighting. The feeling that they had reached a solution of their differences put every one in a good temper. "Though it do seem hard that Dad should have his show divided up this way," said Matthew, "after he'd given his life to building of it."

"Better divide up than smash up," said Marta. "And if you boys have any guts you'll set to work building on your tod's. If there ain't room for you all in one country, there's a-plenty of others."

"Gor blimey, so there is!" exclaimed George.



It was surprising how, with the near prospect of each becoming his own master, the Beckett family fell into harmony again. Now that only a few weeks of working together remained, nothing appeared worth fighting over. In those last weeks it seemed that old Sam had returned to take charge, so unanimous was the spirit of the brothers. Work went merrily, business prospered, the season's happy end atoned, in some measure, for its bad beginning. As Matthew remarked one day, if they could work together like this there seemed very little reason for splitting up.

But, "There's every reason," said Marta firmly. "Your memory's too short, my lad."

On the last night they sang "Auld Lang Syne," and most of them wept, remembering Sam. The next morning they set out for Gaythorne, where they had agreed to hold the division of the stock. Matthew won first pick and chose the monkeys, for, next to Hester and the children, he cared for them above everything in the world, and having trained and tended them, and their parents, and grandparents since he was a lad, his one anxiety had been that they should not pass into other hands. Indeed, had that happened, he had decided to buy them back, even at twice their value.

Alfy had the elephants and arranged with Barnaby that he should find an assistant whom he could train to Moll's liking before next season. "For it looks as if my travellin' days is done," said Barnaby, "and though I'm loath to part from her, it must come to that sooner or later." Tommy took the cats, and with them Checko. Jack had the dogs, Norman the big-top and the façade, and seating. Andrew had some of the horses, Cyrus others, and so it went on. "But I'm havin' nought but dibs," said George, "for me and Julia's off to Australia to jine the kangaroos, and Sarah's comin' along to box 'em."

"Which leaves eight shows in the old country," said Jack. "Caw! Will the old country stand for it?"

But it turned out to be only four shows, for, so amiable did the brothers feel after the division, that some of them decided to join forces again. Tommy argued that he would never find a more capable, or more amenable, ring-master than Matthew, and Matthew, who had none of the instincts of the boss about him,

was glad enough to work under Tommy. Jack and Alfie decided that they could manage to work together, and so did Norman and Dolf and Andrew. But Cyrus said, no, once on your tod, remain on your tod, and then if aught goes wrong, you know who to blame. Then, as nobody wanted to take on the responsibility of Gaythorne, it was put up for sale, and was bought by an eccentric philanthropist who pictured himself gathering the young men of the village into the practice shed every Wednesday and Saturday for gymnastic classes, the girls into the elephant shed for first-aid classes and country dancing every Tuesday, and the mothers into the farm kitchen on alternate Thursdays, to be instructed, over tea and buns, on the proper management of their children. And as this eccentric philanthropist paid what was asked of him without demur or bargaining, no one troubled to remind him that the road that led to Gaythorne was long and steep, the lane in winter muddy, and that on black nights it would take more than gymnastic classes and cups of tea to persuade youths and maidens and middle-aged women past a hedge where a ghost in a red skull-cap was known to hover.

"Let him and the old ghost fight it out," said Alfie. "What does it matter to us?"

"And what about you?" said Tommy to Luke, "I'll take you on, if you're willing."

Luke turned pale, his lips pouted and his eyes burned darkly blue. The breaking up of Beckett's seemed to him a signal, something he had been waiting for; and yet, now it had come, he felt awed by what he intended to do. He was in his twenty-second year; the book where it was "all wrote down" turned a leaf and showed him a new chapter.

"I'm thinkin' of startin' on me own," he said, and the blood rushed to his face with the audacity of what he said.

"Caw!" said Tommy. "Don't be soft. You're but a kid."

"I'm gone twenty-one."

"And I'm gone forty-nine. You can't do without experience."

But Luke was firm. He had such a long way to go, it seemed to him he must waste no more time before setting out.

"Well," said Tommy, "if you're mind's made up, that's

all there is to it. But, mark my words, you'll come a buster. What about capital?"

"I've—saved a bit," stammered Luke.

"Bit? I should think it was a bit, too small a bit to see," said Tommy derisively. He went into the farm kitchen, where his brothers and brothers-in-law were assembled, Alfy with a ledger checking up each one's account.

"There's a new show startin' next season," he said with a chuckle, "Moppit's Circus."

"I don't think," said Alfy.

"S'true—or so he says."

"He's crackers," said Norman.

"I was thinkin' of invitin' him to jine the kangaroos," said George.

"Thought he was sweet on Anna," said Cyrus.

"Seems he's sweeter on himself," said Tommy, frowning.

"Well—I wish him luck," said Andrew.

"So do we all," said Jack, "but he's soft in the head, that's sure."

Matthew pondered. "You remember, boys, how he brought in the elephants that time?"

"Not likely to forget," said Tommy.

"Did he get any thanks for it?" asked Matthew.

"Nothin' particular, didn't ask for none," said Alfy.

"Well," said Matthew, "if he's startin' on his own——?"

"You're right!" exclaimed George. "Pass round the hat, boys!"

"We might have a bit of fun over this," suggested Norman.

That evening, Luke sat in Marta's wagon, detailing to her his plans for the great adventure of "starting on his own."

"Just a very small tent, Gran'an, and a couple of ponies; three or four dogs——"

Bless the lad, thought Marta, how young and earnest he looked! Like a small boy, like the little lad she had taken to his first circus.

—"And some gates for the ponies, and hoops and a see-saw for the dogs."

It seemed to Luke that he had said all this before, that he had been saying it for years and years, all the time he had been grow-

ing up, all the time he had been practising and working for Beckett's, ever since the beginning. "*In the beginning Lucio Castelli created a circus.*" He laughed to himself, remembering a copy-book in which he had written these words, the hurriedly spilled ink streaming over the page, and the caning, during which he had prayed that the Lord might cause Mr. Kirk not to remember the drill display. "I've been planning for it all my life," he said, his strange eyes darkening, "and now——"

There was a loud banging at the door, and Herman, in his clown's dress, with his ginger wig standing on end, came bounding into the wagon. "Moppits and Marta Castelli wanted in the kitchen, *immediate*," he said, and bounded out again.

"What now?" asked Marta. "Well, we best do as we're told."

In the kitchen they found all the circus company assembled, from baby Isaac, Euphemia's youngest, to old Moomoo. Baby Isaac, who had just been "shortened," wore a green velvet frock with gold braid on it, and little rabbit fur boots, one of which he was industriously sucking. Old Moomoo wore a false nose, a yellow wig, and a dress with hundreds of thousands of sequins. They were all dressed up, the kitchen lamp and the merry flames on the big hearth lit crimson and silver vests, striped trousers, tights of every hue of the rainbow, coloured plumes and feathers, gay shawls, outlandish hats, beaded fringes, satin pumps, red boots and a crowd of smiling, painted faces.

"What the 'nation is all this about?" asked Marta, "and me in me dirt?"

"Come over and sit by us, Marta," called Roxy, "I've kept a space for you. The throne's for Moppits."

The kitchen table had been pushed back against the wall, and there were at least a dozen people sitting on it. Others had grouped themselves about the fireplace. An empty chair had been set, throne wise, on an elephant tub at the end of the room. The chair was covered with a bright cloth and padded with two lumpy best seat cushions. Luke, feeling bewildered, stood by the door. Jack, in fool's cap, Humpsti-Dumpsti comedy costume and waving a red balloon dangling on the end of a stick, invited Luke to "ascend the throne" which he did, after a startled glance round at the laughing company.

Then Tommy, who was wearing his dashing Cossack outfit, got up and made a speech.

"Lad-ies *and* gentlemen, a-hem, silence if you please! Seein' as how our Moppits is leavin' us shortly, and as how we appreciate his four years of faithful services——"

"Five years," interrupted somebody.

"Make it six, whilst you're about it," shouted somebody else.

"Four or five or six years of faithful service," went on Tommy, "in which he showed his devotion to Beckett's " (a burst of applause from everybody). "Be quiet a minute, can't you?—Faithful service, no, devotion to Beckett's, by many little acts of charity, such as roundin' up runaway pigs and that——"

"And nursin' our kids for us," interrupted Euphemia.

"An' carryin' water," called Helena.

"An' saddlin' the prads," broke in Anna.

"An' doin' everything as was ever asked without a grumble which is more than most do," shouted Roxy, all in one breath.

"Shut up!" called Tommy. "Let me speak. Seein' as how, as you say, we feel beholden to our Moppits for this and that and t'other things, we are now here gathered for to wish him luck in his future career, and to offer him a slight—what's-his-name——"

"Token," shouted Dolf.

"Mark," yelled Andrew.

"Symbol," suggested Alfy.

"Am I makin' this here speech, or are you?" bawled Tommy. "Well then, token, mark, or symbol, if you like, no, tokens, for there's more than one of 'em, tokens of our united good will. Here, Bella and Henry and Wilhelmina, get goin'."

Giggling and whispering Bella and Wilhelmina, in their white ballet dresses, and Henry, very solemn in black velvet tunic and Russian boots, hurried from the kitchen. In a moment, Bella returned, leading the black pony, Dolly, gaily adorned with a red plume and a red bridle. Matthew, pointing his ring-master's whip, gave Dolly "the office" and she went down on her front knees, and bowed her pretty head at Luke's feet. Then Henry came in with a couple of white poodles, who had their top-knots and tails tied up with blue ribbon, and who, at a word from

George, walked yelping on their hind legs all the way from the door and sat up side by side in front of Luke's chair.

Last came Wilhelmina, carrying a little canvas bag, which chinked encouragingly as she placed it in Luke's hands.

"We have the honour to present you," said Tommy, "with Dolly and with Judy and Draggles, and with a bag containing twenty-five sovereigns. We can't present you with the kids, seein' as how their mothers wouldn't agree, but——"

"Enough said," called Cyrus. "Sit down, you bloody fool, and let Moppits have a hearin'!"

"Speech, speech, speech!" Everybody was clamouring, as Luke got up and held out his hands.

It was not much of a speech Luke made, overwhelmed as he was with surprise and gratitude. He laughed lest he should cry, and tried to make jokes lest he should make a fool of himself. But he did manage to stammer out his thanks, to tell them that the years he had spent with them were the happiest years of his life, and that he loved—loved them all.

Whereat Roxy rushed forward and embraced him, and the other women did the same, and Marta leaned her head against the wall and laughed loudly, with the tears running down her cheeks; and the children crowded round the throne and called "Hurrah for Moppits!" and baby Isaac, having by this time discovered that he did not like the taste of his rabbit-fur boot, broke into ear-splitting yells, and was thrust by a laughing Euphemia into Luke's embarrassed arms.

After that there were bottles of beer and sandwiches, and then Moomoo played the fiddle, and they danced with such gusto that the dust flew up from the floor boards and the plaster fell down from the beams. The children crept into corners and fell asleep, but nobody thought of going to bed until the sound of the lions roaring in the orchard reminded them that it was already dawn. . . .

Anna stood in the dawn outside the porch that gave on the yard. She was wearing an equestrienne costume of white satin with wide fur sleeves, she was hot and excited with all the fun and the dancing. Most of the company had gone, laughing and yawning to their beds, but Anna did not feel sleepy. She saw

Luke crossing the yard. He was whistling softly to himself, walking with a jaunty step, hands in pockets.

"Moppits!"

Luke came and stood beside her. Anna smiled, he looked so happy. "Did yer like all that, Moppits?"

"More than I can say, I liked it."

"My! I'm sweatin'," With the palm of her hand Anna lifted back the heavy curls from her hot forehead. The wide fur sleeve fell back from her sturdy brown arm. She looked away over the yard to the orchard trees. The leaves of the trees, gold and russet, stood out boldly against the dawn sky. "You and me'll soon be biddin' each other good-bye, Moppits," she said.

"Yes," said Luke. "But we shall meet again."

"Oh aye. But not like this." Anna's gaze was still far away watching the gold and russet leaves against the sky. "You still got your girl, Moppits?"

"Yes."

"And—there's Leone," said Anna slowly.

"You going to marry Leone?"

"Looks like it's me fate," said Anna, with a nervous laugh.

"Moppits——"

"Aye?"

"You won't lose what I gave yer?"

"No."

"Well—Moppits." Anna glanced round the yard; there was no one stirring. "Come in the porch a minute. Now kiss us for good-bye."

Under the heavy timbered porch the shadow of night still lingered. Luke put his hands on Anna's shoulders. He bent his head and kissed her lips. How sweet her breath smelled! As if, Luke thought, she fed on nothing but roses. His hands slid from her shoulders to her back, the slim, firm, muscular back so beautiful to feel under the satin of her ring costume. Their lips met again, and her arms were under his coat and clasped round his waist, and their bodies were pressed close together as if they were lovers.

For one instant then, perhaps, Fate held its breath. Or perhaps this embrace of theirs was already written down by that august Chronicler in a paragraph which duplicated itself in their

separate histories. At any rate, Anna was trembling, and Luke was trembling, and neither of them was trembling with cold. "Oh, Moppits!" sighed Anna. Then she laughed and pushed him away. "Funny face, Moppits," she said softly. "Go on to bed with you," and turned from him and ran into the kitchen.

Leone was in the kitchen, lounging in two chairs drawn close to the embers of the fire. Leone was not dressed-up, he had absented himself from the presentation, considering the whole affair to be childish and ridiculous. He was merely wearing one of his foppish suits, but he looked in this, as in everything he wore, beautiful beyond his fellows.

"You!" exclaimed Anna, in a startled whisper.

Leone got up indolently. "Yes, me," he said. "That cub gone to bed?"

"What cub?"

"Moppits."

"Moppits has gone to bed," answered Anna with dignity.

Leone took a quick stride forward and grasped her by both her wrists. His eyes were as soft and all over brown and expressionless as if they were made of velvet. "You belong to me," he said under his breath, "and don't you forget it."

A flame leaped in Anna's wide eyes, leaped and dwindled. They were appealing now, and almost scared, belying her stubborn words.

"I belong to meself an' I'm goin' to bed. Leave me go."

Leone dropped her wrists. Anna turned her back on him and walked out of the kitchen. Leone yawned and reached up his arms in a long luxurious stretch, which caused a sensation of physical ease and well-being to ripple through his body from fingertips to toes. "Little tiger cat Anna—on the leash." He smiled, snapped his fingers at the disordered kitchen, and strolled off, well satisfied with himself, to his wagon.

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## BOOK THREE



I

Beckett's, Gaythorne, Hazelfield, Kent,  
Nov., 21st, 1910.

DEAR Else,

You will be surprised to learn that I am leaving here. Perhaps you read in the papers of Sam Beckett's sad death, trodden by Moll, the elephant. But she never was wicked. Well Else, Beckett's have split up into four. I could get a job with one of them but have other notions. I am starting on my own next season. They have given me a pony, two dogs and £25. And I have my savings as you know. I have a pal Otto who works perch act with me. He said last night he would throw in his lot with mine. I said it would be but a small chat and little takings, but never mind for that he said. It is good to have such a pal. Then Alphonse and Frieda and Herman said they would come along too. Herman is a first-class clown though but a kid still, and Alphonse tidy at juggling. Also he wrestles a grizzly and Tom Beckett says the beastly old thing you can have it, for nobody else can't work it, and better give it away than shoot it, he says. So we shall be five and the pony, dogs and grizzly. I can buy a small tent and another pony with my savings, and a wagon of sorts, though not a grand one yet, I'm sure.

Else I want for you and me to get married this winter as we always said we would some day.

We are leaving to-morrow, me travelling with Marta. I have bought a draft horse cheap from Tommy. So look out for us in about a fortnight's time.

Your cul,

Luke.

Elsie found this letter waiting for her when she came home from the theatre. Elsie was in regular work, now, though to be sure she had not risen any higher than to kick her legs and sing, as leader of the chorus. "You haven't enough personality, my

gal," Mr. Hessop had explained, when Elsie had boldly asked him for a better part in the musical comedy he was then producing. "You're pretty and all that, I'm not denying, but you're not IT."

And Elsie had gone home and cried with rage and torn her handkerchief to shreds, and, glaring at her face in the mirror, had shrieked at it derisively "pretty and all that!" And the face that showed its teeth and bit at a torn handkerchief hadn't looked even pretty as it grimaced back at her out of the mirror. It seemed to Elsie that she was brimming with personality and that she was IT, itself. And if Mr. Hessop didn't think so, a great many other men did, one of them a Mr. Wainwright, who was a commercial traveller and ever such a masher, and who frequently drove her home from the theatre in his cab.

On the night when Elsie found Luke's letter waiting for her on the hall table, Mr. Wainwright had both driven her home and presented her with a bunch of violets and a large box of chocolates. Elsie, going up to her room, unpinned the violets from her coat and put them in her tooth glass. Then she opened her box of chocolates, began to chew, carefully rolled up the blue ribbon that had tied the box and put it away in a drawer, then sat on her bed, unpinned her hat, kicked off her high-heeled shoes, helped herself to another chocolate and read Luke's letter.

When she got to the last paragraph but one, she frowned, put a third chocolate into her mouth, and giggled. "If he hasn't got some cheek!" she exclaimed. "Two dogs and a pony!"

No, Elsie didn't think so. She would much prefer to marry Bertie Wainwright. That was his name, Bertie, and he had said, "Call me Bertie, sweetheart," when he kissed her in the cab. She knew what he wanted, of course, same as all men wanted; maybe the same as Mr. Hessop wanted, the flat-eyed snake, before he'd give her a better part in his silly little opera. But Elsie wasn't going to cheapen herself that way, a few kisses of course, but nothing else. If men could have what they wanted without marrying, why then they never would marry, that was obvious. Elsie hiccuped, and giggled again. Besides kisses, Bertie Wainwright had given her a drink of champagne in the cab. The gas of it was rising now in delicious stinging bubbles inside her nose. Champagne! Yes, Bertie had money to throw about, all right; she

would like to be a rich man's darling, even if the rich man *were* twenty years older than herself and going a little bald.

"I should have to give up my profession, of course," thought Elsie, getting off the bed to look at herself in the glass. "But I'm sick to death of my profession. It doesn't lead me anywhere. My, you are lovely!" she said to her smiling reflection.

Wide blue eyes, the sweetest little nose, red lips that, when closed, formed a perfect cupid's bow. Masses of hair that shone like the sun, piled in curls above a smooth white forehead. Firm full bust, a tiny waist, swelling hips, and legs that met together all the way down to their well turned ankles; you couldn't see that in the mirror, naturally, but in tights it was so. If all these charms couldn't contrive to enchain the soft and somewhat sentimental heart of Mr. Wainwright, then what was the use of Elsie's possessing them? Mr. Wainwright travelled in ladies' underwear, which was quite genteel—and useful moreover. What did that Luke want to come home at all for? Luke belonged to the past, to childishness and dreams that the grown-up Elsie had outlived.

Oh well, Elsie supposed she could manage Luke all right. She could manage everybody, with the exception of Mr. Hessop.

"Luke can't expect me to abide by that old nonsense," thought Elsie, as she took the pins from her hair and brushed out her shining curls.

Mr. Wainwright was waiting for Elsie at the stage door on the next night and on the night after that. On Friday he presented her with a gold bracelet and suggested a trip to Cleethorpes for Sunday. "I know a quiet little hotel," he said.

"For dinner?" asked Elsie innocently.

"No honey, for the night," replied Mr. Wainwright.

"I should be frightened," said Elsie coyly.

"What a cruel thing to say!" exclaimed Mr. Wainwright. "Can't you trust me?"

Elsie knew she couldn't trust him. His kisses, for one thing, told her that she couldn't. She had to be quite stiff with him in the cab that night, and he muttered something derisive about virgins. Elsie pretended not to hear this remark, and she told him she had an appointment with a girl friend for Sunday, so she couldn't go to Cleethorpes anyway . . . And on Monday, Mr. Wainwright wasn't

waiting for her at the stage door, and she had a fright that he had gone away and that she would never see him again.

But on Tuesday there he was with his cab, waiting as usual.

"Oh," said Elsie, as she took his hand, "I thought you'd left Whitfield."

"Well, I hadn't, you see," answered Bertie Wainwright, helping her into the cab.

There was something on his mind, Elsie could see that; he neither called her "sweetheart" nor kissed her. Indeed he was so glum, sitting there beside her with folded arms, that by and by she giggled, put her hand on his knee and said, "What's the matter, Bertie?"

Mr. Wainwright took Elsie's hand and squeezed it. "Only that you don't love me," he said. "I spent a miserable week-end."

"You never asked me if I loved you," murmured Elsie.

"Well, I ask you now. Do you?"

For answer, Elsie crushed her head, big hat and all, down on his breast, and Bertie put his arms round her and whispered "Darling! Darling!"

"And you will come to Cleethorpes with me next Sunday?" said Bertie when they had done kissing.

"Oh," cried Elsie, "how can I? How can I, you bad man, without you marry me?"

"Well, I will marry you," said Bertie Wainwright valiantly. "But not before next week-end."

Perhaps that didn't matter? Elsie wondered about it. She wouldn't say "yes" and she wouldn't say "no," about Cleethorpes. She didn't mean to lose him, and she might lose him by going, and she might lose him by not going. On Thursday he told her he was leaving Whitfield early next week and mightn't be round that way again for goodness knows how long. That decided her. Yes, she would go, she said.

She told her parents that she and some of the other girls were going to Cleethorpes for "a bit of fresh air." "Tones up the system," said Elsie, "to get away now'n again."

The night at Cleethorpes wasn't all she had anticipated. It wasn't Bertie Wainwright's fault. He was an experienced and accomplished lover. But Elsie had little passion in her make-up,

and what she had did not respond to the flabby, cigar-scented, unmuscular flesh of Mr. Wainwright. It was a bit disgusting, she thought, when she woke up on Monday morning, and saw Mr. Wainwright's egg-shaped head, with the bald patch on top, lying so close to hers. Also, he had been snoring in the night, and that was not at all romantic of him. "When we're married I shall have my own room," decided Elsie, as Bertie Wainwright, waking up, rolled towards her and scratched her cheek with his unshaven chin.

"And you'll write and fix up the wedding, won't you?" said Elsie, when he saw her off at Cleethorpes station.

"Surely, honey," said Bertie Wainwright.

A porter slammed the carriage door, the guard put his whistle to his lips. Elsie suddenly remembered something, and thrust her head through the window. "You never gave me your address," she said.

"My address?" Bertie Wainwright clapped his pockets. "If I haven't gone and left my card-case at the hotel!" he exclaimed. "Never mind, I'll send it, I'll send it, I'll write to-morrow."

Elsie took a little notebook from her bag. "You can write it now—" she began.

But the train was moving. Bertie kissed his hands to her and ran a little way along the platform. Then he stood and waved to her till the train turned into a tunnel. Elsie drew in her head and pulled up the window. "Well, I s'pose it's all right," she thought dubiously. "And if it isn't—I'll have to take gunpowder . . ."

"So your beau isn't coming for you this evening," said Mollie Bradshaw, as she overtook Elsie on her way home from the theatre on Monday. "You've got to foot it t'night, same as the rest of us."

"Mr. Wainwright has gone back to London for a bit," explained Elsie.

"Oh, so he has?" Molly's heels and Elsie's heels made a tipperty duet on the pavement. "Saw you on the prom at Cleethorpes yesterday," said Molly brightly. "I was there with me cousin."

Elsie drawled: "Oh yes?" as if she wasn't at all interested. She didn't care for Molly. She didn't care for any of the chorus



girls, for that matter, she thought them common. They dropped their "h's" sometimes. Elsie never dropped hers, nowadays; she was careful in her speech, quite the lady.

"I don't want to appear intrusive," said Molly after a while, "but I s'pose you know he's married?"

"Who's married?"

"Mr. Wainwright."

"No, he isn't," said Elsie sharply.

"Yes he is, then. Beryl Manners has an uncle in London. And her uncle 'as a chum that works for the same firm as Mr. Wainwright. And his wife rings him up on the telephone, and she's mad with him as often as not."

"I don't believe it," said Elsie, "and I'm taking a tram."

"Thought it right to warn you," called Molly to the stiffly held back, as Elsie boarded the tram. "One in the eye for you, my girl," she said, as she tripped on her way through the badly lighted street. Elsie was not popular with the other girls, she was stuck-up, and gave herself airs, they said.

Elsie cried herself to sleep that night. She had been a fool; she ought to have known the sort of man he was. She had known, really . . . Towards dawn she woke up in a rage and threw the bracelet he had given her out of the window. Then she thought better of it, and put on her dressing-gown and went down to retrieve the bracelet from the street before some early passer-by should pounce on it. And Mrs. Hunt woke up and shrieked, "Burglars!" and Elsie called "Don't be so soft, mother, it's me going down in the shop for a bun or something. I'm hungry."

Well, she had got the bracelet and one or two other trinkets, besides the gold ring he had given her to go to Cleethorpes, but that didn't make up; no, it did *not* make up. All next day Elsie was in a pretty temper, and at the theatre the girls giggled and whispered behind her back, and she knew well enough what they were saying. The first chance she got she'd pay off that Molly Bradshaw for telling tales on her.

Bertie Wainwright did not send Elsie his address, nor did she now expect him to. She hoped against reason for a day or two, and then she hoped no more. But one night, towards the end of the week, when the girls were changing after the show,

fat William knocked at the dressing-room door, put in his head and announced, "A gent waiting below for Miss Hunt."

A gent? Bertie? He had come back after all! Oh ho, girls, you'll be giggling on the wrong sides of your faces! Elsie thrust her feet into her shoes, hurled on coat and hat, gave a last look in the mirror, a last pat to her hair, and ran down the stairs and along the narrow stone corridor. The stage door was open, rain fell slanting and golden in the light of the street lamp. Just inside the door, dusky against the slanting rain, a man was standing. But it was certainly not Bertie Wainwright.

"Hullo, Else!"

The familiar deep, slightly burring voice, resonant as some low-keyed musical instrument that you had never heard, yet could imagine; an instrument played by naked savages, perhaps, on an island that was warm and moonlit. Elsie hesitated a moment, then, with a little cry of joy, which sounded very natural, though she was not sure whether she meant it or not, she flung herself into Luke's arms.

"Luke! Luke! What a turn you gave me! O-oh Lu-uke!"

"I went to the house and they told me you was here. I say Else—" he held her off and looked at her bright face under the dim gas light, "you've grown that handsome!"

"Think so?" Elsie laughed and patted her lustrous hair. With every movement a fragrant scent—violets, was it?—wafted out into the stuffy corridor. Luke sniffed appreciatively. "And you smell that sweet," he said.

Elsie laughed again. She couldn't return the compliments. No one could say Luke was handsome, that would be going too far, nor did he smell of any scent, only of rain and the night air. But then, Bertie Wainwright wasn't handsome, either, and though Elsie had, at first, liked the perfume of eau-de-Cologne on his hands, after that night at Cleethorpes—no, she hadn't liked it any more.

"Let's have a look at *you*, now," she said to Luke, and turned up the gas till it whistled

A man. Yes, a man indeed, upright, graceful, with a well-fitting suit, a spotless collar, a sunburnt face, and eyes so deep in colour, so alive, so fearless, they were almost frightening, because it seemed as if they must read all your secrets. And

then that thick, wavy hair, greased and gleaming, rather on the long side, but artistic looking and unusual—"Why, you're quite a toff, Luke," she said; "and tall, my word, you've grown inches! Hold on, I've forgotten my hanky. Will you wait while I fetch it?"

She ran up to the dressing-room again. "*Girls!*" she announced, whirling in upon the chattering group with an exaggerated air of excitement. "Oh, girls, what *do* you think! My boy's come back—the one I've been engaged to for years. He's *stunning*-looking—and so clever! Isn't it *lovely*, girls? Well, I musn't keep him waiting—oh I am *thrilled*! So long, everybody!"

"Bet *he* doesn't know about Cleethorpes, nor never will, poor fool," observed Molly Bradshaw, as the door slammed behind Elsie.

"Goodness! Look at the rain," said Elsie, as she and Luke met again at the stage door. "I musn't catch a cold, because of my voice. Didn't we ought to take a cab?"

"I'll see for one," said Luke, and dashed out hatless into the rain.

When Luke came back, Molly Bradshaw, Beryl Manners and one or two of the other girls were coming along the corridor. Luke didn't seem to be aware of them, though Elsie was keenly so. Luke looked at Elsie's feet in their high-heeled patent leather shoes. "Those thin little shoes," he said, "you musn't soak them through," and with that he lifted her as easily and gracefully as if she were made of thistledown, and carried her across the streaming pavement and the flowing gutter and set her down inside the cab.

It wasn't only that the girls were watching, no it wasn't only that. As Luke had lifted her, Elsie had felt the muscles ripple up his arms as if they were living and separate entities running to do his bidding, and it was an extraordinary and wonderful sensation, the like of which she had never experienced or imagined. It stirred her in a way that Bertie Wainwright, for all his practised love-making, had never been able to stir her. Something leaped and sang in her blood; as Luke shut the cab door and sat down beside her, she turned to him with a soft exclamation of pleasure that was quite genuine, and tilted up her face to be kissed.

Those kisses too—who had she ever found before that could kiss like that? Not the sort of kisses that make you feel a chap's out for everything, and as soon as may be, too. Not silly little kisses, either, that makes you feel a chap's out for nothing, and might as well be kissing his grandmother, or his baby sister. No, these were, well—how *could* you describe them?—Kisses, with a capital K, soft, deep, warm, perfect; kisses that seemed to be creations, suited to the time and circumstance, and, for the time and circumstance, entirely satisfying.

“O-oh, Luke” sighed Elsie. “You do kiss nice!”

Who would have believed it? During that drive from the Theatre Royal to Camershaw Road, as Luke sat with his arm round her, Elsie's spirit was shedding sheath after sheath of the tiresome, encumbering, non-essential matter in which through the years it had been busy encasing itself: sheaths of artificiality, of worldliness, of self-importance, of greed, of vanity. If she had been asked, at any future time, to define her feelings during that drive, she would probably have said that she “felt good.” And perhaps that would have been as comprehensive a definition as any more elaborate one. She found herself, during that hour's drive, to have become simply woman, trustful and at peace in the presence of her mate; happy without any forward or backward looking, humble too, but with a humility that somehow felt right and did not hurt. For this strangely translated Elsie, the rickety old cab, smelling of straw and damp upholstery, might have been the Garden of Eden, or Elysium, or any one of those delightful bowers described by poets and desired of all men, bowers where the complexities and adulterations of the world have not yet entered.

“Luke,” said Elsie softly, as the cab drew up on the corner of Camershaw Road, “will you carry me again?”

Of course he would, he wanted to! This was his girl, and she was beautiful and she was tender, she was Elsie, with all the old tiresomenesses which he had, at times, rather dubiously remembered, somehow miraculously removed. He set her down at her door, kissed her good-night, and strode off to Marta's yard, feeling that the world was a warm and happy and altogether satisfying place.

Elsie smiled, and sighed, and went up to her room. She

forgot even to look at her face in the mirror, she sat on her bed, and smiled, and sighed. So that was Luke, her Luke, and she loved him. And this was what love did to you. . . .

Then she remembered Cleethorpes. "I'll have to tell him," she thought. "No, I can't! I won't!" And with that "won't," the translation of Elsie ended. Her spirit shrank and, feeling itself cold and small, began to draw on, one after another, the encasing sheaths it had discarded. The first sheath was fear, and after fear came pettiness, and after pettiness came arrogance, and after arrogance, worldly wisdom.

"He thinks I'm IT," she reminded herself. "And so I am. I shan't have to tell him, and I shan't have to take gunpowder, because if anything happens I'll be married, and it'll be all right."

•

## I I

WHEN Elsie told her parents that she was going to marry Luke Castle, there was something of an outcry. Mr. Hunt said he considered his daughter ought to look higher, and Mrs. Hunt said that Elsie was off her chump, and what had become of that nice Mr. Wainwright? Elsie said that Mr. Wainwright had proved himself a rotter, and that she had turned him down.

"And don't you dare to mention his name again, neither to me nor to any one else!" she flashed, in sudden fear lest her mother should go babbling to Luke. "I never cared for him the least scrap," she protested. "He *would* see me home and that—pushed himself on me—so what was a girl to do? But I've been engaged to Luke since I was eleven."

"Is that so?" asked Alfred Hunt, whose thoughts did not move quickly.

"And he's ever so clever," went on Elsie, "and he's going to start a circus of his own, and one day he'll be Lord Luke, with royalty shaking hands, and then you'll be glad I married him."

"Oh, well," sighed Minnie Hunt, "if you must, you must, I suppose, but I did have other dreams for you."

Mrs. Hunt's broad bosom heaved, she stood on tiptoe and looked over her husband's mealy-coloured bald head into the mirror above the fireplace. She had had other dreams for herself, once, yet here she was, stout and middle-aged, though still comely, merely a baker's wife. "If Alfred had only a bit more go," she thought, "we could make a splash with our savings." Alfred was a careful man, he saved yearly and invested his savings in shipping shares. But what was the use of moiling and toiling, thought Minnie Hunt, if you weren't to have the pleasure of spending what you earned?

"You better ask Luke to come round and see me," said Alfred Hunt, with a burdensome sense of parental responsibility.

"To see *us*," corrected Minnie Hunt, who never allowed Alfred to leave her out of anything.

Luke came. He stood before them upright and earnest, and

answered their questions frankly. The secret of Castelli's Circus, which had lain on his breast so long, was now out, and he found himself both able and willing to talk about it. "Of course we shan't have much at first along," he said, "but I *know* I'm going to make a success."

"You talk big, don't you, young feller?" said Alfred Hunt.

"I know I shall succeed," answered Luke simply. "I've always known it."

They dismissed him with their blessing. What other could they do, since Elsie, being thoroughly spoiled, always got her own way? Also, being now twenty-two, she was under no legal necessity to consult them, in any case, and of this she had reminded them in no uncertain terms.

When Luke had gone, Alfred Hunt said heavily, "He talks convincing does that young man, though he did once put his fingers in me till!"

"Oh that!" said Minnie Hunt. "Elsie told me about that," and she explained to her husband the motive of Luke's childish delinquency. "It was all along of that pony," she said. "I see now. He was dreaming of his circus even in those days."

Mr. Hunt chuckled slowly. "Who'd 'a thought it?" he said.

"Yes, who'd 'a thought," echoed Mrs. Hunt, "that that sulky little lad 'ud have grown so manly and outspoken? I like him, Alfred, there's something about him, you can't deny it, so it's no use your trying."

"I'm not trying," said Alfred. "Chap's all right."

And then Minnie Hunt looked at her fat, good-natured face in the glass again, and astonished her husband by saying dreamily, "I wonder what would 'a happened, Alfred, if you'd took up circus?"

Luke's plan was to get an engagement in some northern music hall for the Christmas season and to return to Whitfield to be married in the spring. But Elsie said, "Please Luke, I want to marry, now. I want to marry before you go." Luke was rather surprised, remembering the coquettish Elsie of other days.

She seemed quite upset at the thought of his taking an engagement and leaving her behind. Her lips trembled and there were tears in her eyes.

"Why, Else!" he said gently.

She took his hand, held it to her breast, and kissed it, and whether she was acting or in earnest she scarcely knew herself. She knew one thing with certainty, that it did not suit her to wait to be married till the spring. "I can't bear you to leave me again," she said.

"But you've got your own contract," said Luke, stroking her hair. "You don't mean to break it, do you? Don't see's you can."

"No-o," sighed Elsie. She put up her arms to his neck, and whispered. "If we're married, then, even if you go, a part of you stays with me."

"Oh, Elsie, Elsie!" The blood surged hotly through Luke's body, "what lovely things you say, what lovely things! . . ."

His girl, his Elsie, who would have thought he could ever feel so passionately, so deeply, so wholeheartedly, about anything in the world except Castelli's Circus? This was love, and this was what love did to you . . .

There remained to go and see his mother and John. He supposed they would come to his wedding, and anyway he couldn't put off calling on them indefinitely. Perhaps it would be all right, perhaps he had been to blame—yes, surely he must have been—for some of the difficulties of his childhood. He remembered what a sullen lad he had been, never willing to do anything for his mother; it seemed odd, that. At Beckett's it was a pleasure to work for anybody: the dirtiest work, the most menial work, he had done it all so enthusiastically. "Then why not at home?" he wondered. "Caw! I must have been a selfish little beggar!"

In this repentant, self-reproachful mood, he opened the gate of No. 19, went up the narrow asphalt path, and knocked at his mother's door. Lilian Castle herself opened it, not very wide; she kept half of herself inside the door, and for a moment she stared at him through her spectacles with the reserved, almost hostile glance she kept for strangers. Then she put her hand to her heart. "Luke!" she said faintly.

"I've not long arrived," said Luke. "Shall I come in, Mam?"

Mrs Castle nodded, opened the door a little wider and walked before him into the front room. There was no fire in the room,



it looked neat and cheerless, with its lace curtains, its aspidistra, its painted fire screen, its crowded furniture and array of stiffly placed figured cushions, with their heavy cord trimmings and tassels. Lilian Castle sat on the edge of a chair, folded her hands and looked at Luke wearily. "I heard you had returned to Whitfield," she said, in a repressed voice.

Was he coming home again to sponge on her and John, to spoil the beautiful and quiet life they two shared together? To strew his belongings about the tidy house, to sulk through meals, to irritate her till she couldn't hold her tongue, but must begin nagging and keep on nagging till she gave herself a headache, whilst he sat glowering at her out of his queer eyes, and spoke no word, good or bad? Lilian Castle felt she couldn't bear it. It was not her fault that this son of hers, whom she had once nursed at her breast and loved so tenderly, was become a stranger to her, and less bearable than a stranger because, by right, he belonged to her. No, it was not her fault.

"How are you keeping, Mam?" asked Luke, because he did not know what else to say. Something dried up in him, she dried it up; the gentle, self-reproachful mood in which he had knocked at her door had vanished. Instead there was despair clutching at his heart.

"I'm not stopping," he explained, and saw the relief that flashed into her eyes before she veiled them. "I just came to see how you and John are getting on."

"John is at school," said Mrs. Castle. "He's a teacher in the grammar school now, he'll be in presently."

Not a word of inquiry as to how Luke was getting on, no eagerness, no interest, no welcome at all. He shouldn't have come, and yet—how could he help coming?

"I'm getting married next week," he said, "to Elsie Hunt."

"Oh."

"A bit quick, but I have to push off on a job, and Else and me decided we'd marry first. Thought perhaps you and John would come to the weddin'."

"Oh yes, thank you."

"There's no obligation, if you'd prefer not."

"I think we ought to come," said Lilian Castle, without enthusiasm.

A latch key rattled, there was a quiet step in the hall. Luke, watching his mother, saw how colour crept into her pale face, making her seem momentarily younger and prettier. "That's John," she said. "Excuse me a minute," and she got up and went into the hall, shutting the front room door behind her.

Whispered voices. "Hell," thought Luke, "it's like a bleedin' funeral"—a flatty's funeral, moreover. He glanced at the closed window, with the aspidistra in its mauve-and-pink pot standing up rigidly in front of it, and the lace curtains hanging down rigidly on either side. In a flash he made up his mind; he leaped to the window, flung it open and bounded through it into the tiny front garden. He was already over the iron gate, which he had not troubled to open, when John and Lilian Castle came into the room.

"Why—he's gone!" exclaimed Lilian Castle weakly.

John frowned. "I hope he hasn't taken anything?" he said primly, as he looked round the room.

That evening, in Marta's wagon, Luke spoke of his coming marriage. Marta, Otto, Frieda, Alphonse and Herman were all assembled. Alphonse sat crouched over the stove; the cold, raw air of Whitfield made him cough. But he was gay and smiling, Frieda had put a mangy fur waistcoat round his shoulders; she was glancing at him uneasily from time to time, but she, too, was smiling.

"Why not fetch the gal round?" said Marta. "And you, Herman, run to the Seven Stars for a bottle of whisky to drink her health in. Stop a minute, here you are, here's the dibs."

She felt in the pocket of her wide skirt and brought out a greasy leather purse from which she took three shillings and a sixpence. "The gover'nment ought to be shot," she said, "taxing honest folk as they do. Never mind for that, this ain't no common occasion."

"And I," said Alphonse, "will buy a bottle, also, perhaps not whisky, but a wine that holds sunshine. See what you can do, my Herman, the best, most sunshiny wine. For, as the Castelli says, this is no common occasion."

"I've got a nice bit of ham in my wagon," said Frieda. "I'll cut some sandwiches."

"And I'll get into me best clobber," said Marta, "if Luke'll

give me five minutes. And you, Alphonse, grease your hair, lad, and take that catskin off your shoulders."

"I'm meeting Else at the theatre," said Luke. "I'll be an hour, or more."

The sandwiches were cut, the table was opened, covered with a gay cloth and laid out with glasses, plates and bottles. Marta was in her flowered satin gown, and Frieda in a dove-grey dress trimmed with pearl buttons. Alphonse had greased his hair and washed his face. Otto had put on his newest fancy waistcoat, and Herman his best suit, when Luke came up the wagon steps with Elsie following him. He pushed open the door and led her in. He looked radiant. "This is Elsie!" he said, in the tone of one who says, "Behold, life's masterpiece!"

"Bless thee, child," exclaimed Marta, as she got up and kissed Elsie on both cheeks, "how pretty thou'rt grown!"

Frieda kissed Elsie; Alphonse, Otto and Herman kissed Elsie. Alphonse was gallant, Otto beaming, Herman wide-eyed with boyish admiration. Elsie certainly did look lovely in her closely fitting royal-blue coat edged with narrow gray fur at the neck and wrists, with her brilliant blue eyes, her exquisite pink cheeks, her long, smiling lips, and with her clustered curls (she had come without a hat) shining under Marta's lamp. Oh yes, Elsie knew she was charming, and the presence of these interesting people, with their virile bodies and their expressive faces, exhilarated her. So did the gay wagon, with its shining brass and coloured ornaments, so did the fact that she was the centre of attention. It was like a scene out of an opera, with herself as heroine, she who had been told by that snake-eyed Mr. Hessop that she wasn't IT, and therefore must remain a chorus girl. But Elsie was IT, to-night, all right, the admiring glances and expressive faces told her so.

"Oh, I am happy," she giggled, when she had drunk a glass or two of Alphonse's sunshiny wine, besides a little—not too much—of Marta's whisky.

"So are we all," Alphonse assured her. "We are happy in your happiness."

Herman sang for them, Otto played the mouth-organ, Alphonse gave them a comic recitation which wavered continually on the verge of indecency, without ever going far enough

to make Elsie feel that she ought to be shocked. Alphonse was very comic, the wagon re-echoed with their laughter and swayed under their stamping feet. Alphonse ended with a burst of coughing, so then Elsie sang for them in a loud and piercing and somewhat grating soprano, Otto whistled a marvellous accompaniment, and the rest joined in the choruses.

Then Otto said, "I will sing to you some songs of the Fatherland," and he sang, *Ach wie ist's möglich dann* and *Morgen muss ich fort von hier* in a voice so full of emotion that the tears stood on Frieda's cheeks, and Elsie laid her shining head on Luke's shoulder, and he put his arm round her and held her close, and felt that he had never been happier in his life.

"And the weddin'," said Marta, when Otto's voice was silent, "what about it? It'll have to be a flatty's weddin', more or less, I s'pose?"

Elsie murmured sorrowfully that she supposed it would have to be. "Seeing as me mother and da'll be coming, and all their friends," she explained. Already she felt that she had taken a leap over the broad line that divides the kingdom of the flatties from the kingdom of the free. And such was the company and such her mood that she was glad that she had taken it.

"But we can come back here and enjoy ourselves," said Marta, "when all the baloney's over."

Elsie kissed them every one again when she said good-night. Her kisses to Otto were particularly affectionate, but that was because of his touching songs, and because of the potency of the sunshiny wine that was gleaming now in her head and heart.

"I do like them," she assured Luke, as they stood embraced outside Marta's wagon. "Eh, but I'm tired! You are strong, aren't you, Luke? Could you carry me again, do you think, just across the yard, like?"

And again, as he lifted her, she experienced an ecstasy that overwhelmed all knowledge of her own inherent difference from him, and dissolved every small worldly ambition into a selfless rapture.

### III

THE wedding of Luke and Elsie went off more smoothly than might have been imagined, considering the strangely opposed natures of the people who attended it. Lilian Castle and John were there, Lilian Castle so neat and prim and correct and repressed, that Marta said that she looked as if she were made of cardboard and dressed in cardboard and had a poker for a backbone; John in bowler hat and end-of-term speech-day suit, and his most solemn schoolmaster manner. ("He might at least have put a bit of flower in his buttonhole," said Marta.) It was the first time Luke had seen John since his return, and the greeting was stiff and condescending on John's part, and embarrassed on Luke's.

Alfred and Minnie Hunt were there; Alfred in the top hat and morning suit which he had worn at his own wedding, which was uncomfortably tight and caused him to breathe in difficult gasps; Minnie in velvet of a purple shade which did not agree with her full-blooded complexion. Mr. Hessop was there in his box-office outfit, and various members of his company, including Scory Appleyard, cutting a dash in the loudest of checks and the most extravagant of ties. Molly Bradshaw and Beryl Manners were bridesmaids. Elsie did not like either of them, and they did not like Elsie, but they praised her appearance and told her she looked too sweet for words in the wedding-dress Lilian Castle had sat up for nights to make, and it gave Elsie a real thrill to reflect that they were both jealous of her. Otto was best man and sweated with nervousness, for he had never been in a church in his life until now. Marta, Frieda, Alphonse and Herman sat in a pew by themselves, and Marta made audible remarks, now and then, and said to Frieda in a loud whisper that the clergyman had a fine ring-master's voice, and that she thought he'd missed his vocation. "For then he'd be doin' some good in the world, 'stead of preachin' what he don't practise, nor expect no one else to." And at the sound of Marta's penetrating whisper, his-

sing through the monotony of the prayer for fruitfulness, Lilian Castle, who knelt just in front of her, turned hot and cold, and set her lips so firmly together that it looked as if she had stitched them together with her sewing machine.

After the service she begged to be excused from attending the reception, explaining in a weak voice that she was suffering from "one of her giddy fits," and John, much relieved, took her home on his arm. The rest of the company repaired to the Hunts' house, where there was port and sherry and an enormous wedding cake in three tiers, with pillars between each tier, and decorated with silver slippers and silver ivy leaves. Alfred Hunt had made the cake himself, and it seemed to him the only sensible enterprise in a week of hectic and unnecessary preparations.

The presents were on view on a side table; there were silver-backed hair brushes, and clocks and cruets, and cushions and d'oyleys and fish slices, and Luke wondered what earthly good they would be to them in the living wagon he proposed to buy in the spring. True, there were some suitable presents, gay china and bright ornaments, a patch-work quilt from Frieda, and a hanging lamp from Marta "to light all your dark hours with happy thoughts." The lamp had gold stars on its blue china bowl, and a hoop of twisted brass to hang it by, which, Marta said with a grin, would keep Elsie busy polishing. There were presents from the Beckett family, and for this Frieda was responsible, for she had written to warn them of the wedding. Anna sent two china dogs with gold chains round their necks and a warm letter to her "dear cul, Moppits." And Elsie pouted and said, "Who's she?" And Luke reminded her of the little circus girl who had given him the fourpenny bit, and Elsie looked troubled and said, "Oh, she?"

The Becketts also sent cards and telegrams, and their greetings shocked Minnie Hunt, for they were unanimous in wishing Luke and Elsie happy nights.

"Why couldn't they say *days*, Alfred?" asked Minnie Hunt, when all the guests had gone, and she had tied an apron over her purple velvet, preparatory to clearing up the litter. "*Days* would have been so much more tasteful."

And Alfred, who had drunk heavily of port, and unbuttoned his waistcoat, and who was feeling very comfortable and non-

critical, answered with ponderous humour, "Well, Minnie, it is mostly done at night, isn't it?"

At which Minnie told him to "go on with him and not be so rude."

The real party, where they could properly enjoy themselves, as Marta expressed it, was in the Lorraines' wagon. And after they had feasted and drunk and laughed and sang to their heart's content, Luke and Elsie went for their wedding night to Marta's wagon which she had given up to them, herself crowding in with the Lorraines and Otto. Luke carried Elsie in his arms from one wagon to the other, and when he had undressed her under the light of the hanging lamp with the golden stars on its blue china bowl, he laid her on Marta's bed, turned out the lamp, and stretched himself beside her under the new patchwork quilt. And as his kisses had been, so was his love making, deep, warm, tender, and entirely satisfying.

"I didn't know it would be like this," murmured Elsie, drowsily, when Marta's rooster, crowing in his coop under the end of the wagon, roused Luke to find his wife nestling in the hollow of his arm. To Elsie the episode at Cleethorpes seemed now more nauseating than ever, by comparison. What a difference between men! Luke was so beautiful to feel, every part of him so alive, the flesh so firm and smooth, the muscles under the flesh so exquisite in movement, the whole body so strong, and yet so warm and gentle. "This is how it was meant to be when a man takes a woman," thought Elsie. Then a suspicion clouded her happiness. How did he come to be so perfect in the art of love making? "Luke," she whispered. "Tell me true—have you done this before?"

What an idea—of course he hadn't! "I've kept it all for you," he assured her.

"O-oh, Luke!" Elsie ran her hand over his smooth back. It was like silk, his skin was, only more polished, more resilient. She couldn't have borne it, she felt, if he had given this perfection to someone before herself . . . And she was sorry—oh she *was* sorry—about Cleethorpes. But she would make it up to Luke by being "ever so good."

"What have I kept for you, Else?" asked Luke dreamily. "A golden-haired daughter, or a comical-faced son? A little

equestrienne, or a little Joey, or a little trapeze artiste with supple body to swing under the dome?"

"I'd like a son, Luke, would you?"

"I don't mind which," answered Luke. "Sons and daughters are all equal in the ring."



## I V

LUKE spent three days with Elsie, then he went off with Otto and Herman to work at the Manchester Hippodrome. Frieda and Alphonse went with the grizzly to Glasgow. Luke felt just a little uneasy over one thing. He had parted with his "luck," his fourpenny bit, given it to Elsie one night because she had coaxed and pleaded, and because he had been in a mood when he could deny her nothing. Afterwards he had thought that perhaps it was a wrong thing to do. He was superstitious about his "luck"; he had carried that little coin in his pocket ever since he was nine years old, and Anna had said not so long ago, "You won't lose that I gave you?" Well, he hadn't lost it, exactly, but still—suppose now his luck were to desert him? A dreadful idea! He thought of it during his act, one evening, and he stalled his most notable trick, the double forward somersault, found himself bounding to earth instead of landing triumphantly on the wire. He was up again immediately, took the somersault once more and achieved it, and won more applause than he would have, had he not stalled. But the episode worried him. On such delicate vibrations does a man's success or failure depend, on such unseen and almost unknowable influences is it poised. Should a man, under any circumstances whatever, part with his talisman, his secret symbol? But there, what bosh, he hadn't parted with it. It was in Elsie's keeping, he and Elsie were now one; there was no more an Elsie and a Luke, there was an Elsie-and-a-Luke, one whole, sharing everything for ever more. At least, that is how Luke felt, and how, of course, Elsie must feel too. But—if she felt that way—why had she wanted to take his fourpenny bit? Oh well, he had given it her, and that was that. But though his reason would try to persuade Luke that it was all right, his instinct persisted that it was all wrong.

By the beginning of March, Alphonse, Frieda, Herman, Otto and Luke were all back in Whitfield, Luke with a small second-hand living wagon, which he had bought very cheaply, because it was dilapidated, from some gipsies in Cheshire, and which he had put in repair, painted and decorated in his spare time.

"You wouldn't know it from new, would you, Else?" he said proudly, as he and she stood admiring it together in Marta's yard. "And see the carving top the panels! I did them bits gilt. I thought gilt 'ud look champion with the green."

Elsie, who had given up her job, and had been living with her parents, had news for Luke. She was with child, she told him. Luke dashed to tell the glad tidings to Marta, and to the Lorraines and Otto. He was beside himself with joy.

"She's looking peaky though," thought Marta, "she didn't ought to be." Marta shook her head; on sober reflection she doubted the wisdom of Luke's mating with a flattie. Acrobat should mate with acrobat, according to Marta's belief. It was better for their work, and it produced more supple offspring. Also flatties were inclined, in Marta's experience, to make an unnecessary fuss over the production of children. As if it wasn't a natural and delightful function! "Howsomever, she'll come in handy to take tickets, I s'pose," reflected Marta, trying to look on the bright side of things.

Luke wanted Marta to travel with them during his first season. But Marta said no. "When young birds first build their nest, they don't want any old hens interferin' with it," she told him. "Another year, p'raps, when you've settled down to each other, like, but not now" . . . "For I reckon she'll prove a spoilt and wayward piece," said Marta to herself. "And I reckon he'll have a time with her, and I reckon it's best to leave him be, to master her on his own."

The tiny circus, with its one pole tent, its pony, its two dogs, its grizzly and its five performers, set out in April. Luke had not been able to afford another pony, as he had hoped, for what with winter keep, a few necessary properties, printing, and odds and ends of repairs, his little capital had dwindled away surprisingly. Herman was clown, and also did the barking outside the show, an office for which his experience with the novelty tent at Beckett's had rendered him proficient. Alphonse juggled, wrestled with the grizzly, and did a lariat and knife throwing act with Frieda, who also did a little stately riding, dressed as the Duchess of Devonshire, on the somewhat stiff-jointed skewbald, Sandow, who drew Luke's wagon. Frieda, in addition, showed people in and sold programmes; there was no seating,

except for the reserved ticket holders, who were accommodated with planks propped on boxes, and a chair or two brought in from the wagons. Elsie sat in the pay-box. Luke was ring-master and put the two poodles, and the pretty pony, Dolly, through their paces. He changed into his blue-and-rose Spanish costume (a parting gift from Roxy) for his low-wire act, which was always loudly applauded, and into cotton tights and vest, which was all they could afford, for the perch act with Otto. Otto also did a strong man act, and he and Luke did dislocations and various other tricks on the rings, also some comic boxing with Herman as referee. "If only I had a good enough rosin-back," said Herman, "we could put on Tommy Beckett's Cossack act—I could work it all right."

But they hadn't a good enough rosin-back. Sandow was too stiff in the joints for a quick act, and the Lorraines' two piebalds had never been broken to the ring, and were now too old. Dolly was much too small. Shining black and very knowing, under Luke's guidance she told fortunes, picked out from the audience the young man who liked kissing girls in the dark, the man who preferred his glass of beer, and the biggest liar present. When Luke asked this last question, he threw out his arms, and Dolly, after trotting once round the ring and seeming to hesitate before this and that member of the audience, finally walked up behind Luke, thrust her head into the small of his back, and pushed him out of the ring.

Altogether it was a decent little show, and though somewhat shabbily dressed (except for the blue-and-rose Spanish costume) the acrobatics, such as there were of them, were far above standard. Perhaps the audiences, who are apt to be swayed by appearances, by glamour and glitter and spangles and magnificence, rather than by any knowledge of technicalities, never realized the skill and precision, the daring and high accomplishment that Luke and Otto and Herman brought to their work.

"Say, Boss, why 'aven't you got a pretty young lady with you?" asked a good-humoured farmer one night, after a rather discouraging performance to a sprinkling of people. "She'd bring t' crowds in all right. Of course no offence meant to t' piece with big 'at and feathers, she can sit an 'orse so good as I can. But why 'aven't you got a pretty young lady?"

Why hadn't they? Why hadn't they a decent rosin-back, why hadn't they lions, tigers, elephants? Why hadn't they a band, instead of Alphonse and Otto taking turns with a barrel-organ? Why not indeed? It was obvious why they hadn't. Funds wouldn't run to it.

"I wish we could afford to engage an equestrienne," said Luke. "I do that."

Young Herman gave a pirouette, fluttered his hands with exaggerated grace, struck an attitude, and said, "Would I not make a pretty young lady?"

Herman's voice was beginning to break, sometimes it was gruff and sometimes it was squeaky, it added to the comic effect when clowning.

"I have a hair on my chin," said Herman. "It is a long one, but it is one, only. I sacrifice it for the Boss!" He put up finger and thumb, tweaked, and held out a tiny golden hair. "Good-bye to Herman's manhood," he said, in a voice husky with mock emotion. "Herman is now a pretty young lady."

"Herman is a bona omei," said Luke. "You'll do champion, so long's you remember not to speak."

"I am dumb, I am dumb!" cried Herman with a mincing gesture.

Frieda cut up one of her dresses, and made Herman a green bodice and full short skirt. He was to wear his own tights, but Frieda padded them with cotton wool round the hips. Herman protested. "The wool is too hot," he said. But Frieda answered, "You are not a girl chavie but a young dona, and donas have round hips." They bought a flaxen wig and Frieda stitched paper roses round it. The muscles of Herman's lean arms stood out taut and defiant, so Frieda made him hanging sleeves of pink muslin. "But his calves!" she exclaimed. "It is a great pity about his calves!"

However, despite the calves, they all agreed that Herman looked elegant, and the full skirt, spraying out over the padded hips, gave him the daintiest waist imaginable. "Now he needs only bosoms," said Frieda, and she took more wool and stuffed it into Herman's bodice.

"I sweat," cried Herman pathetically. "Lord Jesus, how I sweat!"

They called their new equestrienne "Miss Irene," and, since she was not on the bills, Luke, before her entrance, announced her as a "special attraction newly arrived from the continent." And Miss Irene won a round of applause when, perched lightly sideways, with feet crossed and palms resting on Sandow's back, she was escorted by Luke into the ring.

Miss Irene, having cantered once round the ring, performed the usual tricks expected of a lady rider. She did "knees up," that is, she rode on her knees and jumped to her feet and down again to her knees. She knelt on one knee and stretched out the other leg gracefully behind her with the toe well pointed. She executed a twisting vault, from the ground to a sitting position facing Sandow's tail, then left leg over the pommel and on to the ground again. She "jumped the garters" (coloured streamers held out for her by the rest of the company) she "burst the balloon" (leaping through a paper hoop held by Luke) whilst skewbald Sandow of the long neck and the lean head never paused in his plodding and stiff-kneed canter round the ring.

Finally Miss Irene threw off some of her ladylike restraint and did somersaults over the roller, also hung head downward from the pommel and picked up coloured handkerchiefs, and finally took a running leap from the ring to a stand on Sandow's back, a trick which in Tommy Beckett's Cossack act was done at lightning speed with horse at a gallop and always accompanied with loud yells of savage exhilaration. There was not a vast amount of speed required to perform this trick with Sandow, but Herman found it difficult to accomplish without the component yells. On the night of Miss Irene's first appearance, in the excitement of emulating Tommy Beckett, which for years had been the height of his ambition, Herman forgot who he was and, to his horror, before he could stop himself, heard his gruff-and-squeaky voice echoing in one wild cry through the silent tent.

"I guess I mucked up that act, Boss," he said ruefully, when he had ridden out through the back entrance.

"No, no," spluttered Luke, who had doubled up with laughter. "You did champion and you looked like love's young dream. Miss Irene had a durned nasty chest cold though, sure enough. But pretty young ladies goes down all right at Ashbourne's."

The company was delighted with its new equestrienne. Miss Irene was sure the big draw of the lot, they said. Miss Irene was as delighted as the rest of them. Behind the back curtain, waiting to go on, she would preen herself, put her finger to her lip, elevate her shoulders, wag her bottom, wriggle her neck, exclaim in a squeaky voice, "Oh, girls!" and invite any one and every one to "chase her, Charlie."

Elsie tossed her golden head. She looked upon such skittish behaviour as vulgar horse-play. She did not appreciate even a bogus lady's becoming the centre of attention. "Common little squid," she thought, "pushing himself forward." Elsie did not find it easy to queen it over the company at Ashbourne's. They were all very nice to her, of course, but they seemed to regard her nowadays as just one of themselves, just one of a group, and not *the* most important one, as she instinctively felt herself to be. It was very different nowadays, from that evening when Luke had first brought her in to Marta's wagon; then, as she expressed it to herself, she had "burst upon them like a sun" and they had all been dazzled. But now—what was she? Just someone who sat in the pay-box. But she was just as clever as the rest of them, come to that.

"If it wasn't for my condition," she said, "I'd give the flatties some dancing—sword-dances and that. I always got an encore for my Highland sword-dance at the Royal."

"You might try," said Luke. "You don't show any yet. Leastways you wouldn't with a kilt on, that's certain."

But Elsie was horrified. She, in her delicate state! What was Luke thinking of?

"Dolly's in foal," said Luke, "and Judy's going to have pups."

"But that's utterly different!" said Elsie indignantly.

"Perhaps it is," answered Luke. "Though I don't rightly see why it should be."

Elsie was feeling just a little sorry for herself these days, though she was still trying to be "ever so good." She was genuinely fond of Luke, as far as she had it in her to be fond of any one, and she was grateful to him, moreover, because perhaps, though he was not aware of it, he had saved her from a public humiliation. Of course, she couldn't be sure, she didn't

really know whether the child was his, or Bertie Wainwright's, though a married actress had told her, when they were talking about these things at the theatre, one day, that "nothing ever happened the first time." But another actress had contradicted her. Also Bertie had assured her many times, before she agreed to go to Cleethorpes with him, that he wouldn't "dream of hurting a hair of her head." And what did that mean except that he intended to be careful? But, as far as Elsie remembered, when it came to the point, he hadn't been careful. Not that it mattered now.

Only it would be dreadful if Luke found out, and the possibility that he might find out made Elsie feel at a disadvantage with him. Luke, for all he was so gentle and considerate, was hot-tempered in his own peculiar way. You had only to look into his eyes to realize what deep passions burned under that quiet manner of his. And talk about the free ideas of the circus people—well, on this particular question, it seemed to Elsie that Luke was positively narrow-minded, looking upon his wife as possessively as any gorilla of the forest. If he found out, Elsie did not doubt that he would put his two strong hands round her throat, before he could stop himself, and choke the life out of her.

She shivered. The other day she had a real fright. They were pitched behind the pub in a small village near the coast, and it was just before the night-show. Herman was doing his funny stuff outside the tent, she was in the pay-box selling tickets, and Luke, in his red ring-master's coat, standing close to the pay-box window, was calling out "Four pennies to the right, six pennies to the left" (There were no tickets above sixpence on Ashbourne's Midget Circus, as Luke had christened it, except the few reserved seats at ninepence.). Well, Elsie had just handed a 9d. reserved ticket to a smart looking young man with very clean hands, when this young man looked at her brightly, and said, "Hullo! *Hul-lo!* So it's you! I saw you at Gates Hotel in Cleethorpes last autumn, with your husband. I couldn't possibly forget you," said the smart young man, as he gave Elsie the gladdest of glad eyes. "I've been dreaming of you ever since."

And then Elsie realized that this must be the smart young man with whom Bertie had held an interesting conversation on the subject of ladies' corsets in the saloon bar, after dinner. Elsie

had not a particularly good memory for faces, but the face swam up clearly now out of the hazy impressions left by that saloon bar, where Bertie had made her giggle by repeated offerings of glasses of port.

"You're holding up the queue," she had answered tartly, praying that Luke might not have heard.

But he had heard. When they were going to bed that night, he asked. "What did that chap mean? Were you in Cleethorpes last autumn?"

"Yes," said Elsie instantly. "But I didn't have any conversation with him, the cheeky thing. I was taken there one Sunday by a man who was friendly with Mr. Hessop. I'd been poorly, and me mother said it would do me good to get a breath of sea air. We stayed for dinner at the hotel and came back on the 9.30. I enjoyed it, and Mr. Wainwright was very respectful. You don't mind, do you, Luke?"

"Of course I don't. Why should I?" said Luke, kissing her.

But it was a near thing. If she had had a little less presence of mind, or if he had been a little less simply believing, if he had asked a sharp question, or looked at her doubtfully, and if she had stammered, or looked confused, or turned pale, then instead of an assurance and a kiss . . . Elsie shivered, and a hot anger against Luke swept over her. Who was he to make a girl feel guilty and ashamed and frightened? What right had any one to make her feel so uncomfortable? Wasn't it enough that she was going to have a baby, and that she didn't feel well, and that Luke expected her to be up and dressed at an unearthly hour every morning, and to help with the packing—she feeling so bad that she had often to go behind the wagon and be sick—when she might just as well lie in bed comfortably till they arrived at the next pitch?

Dolly in foal and Judy going to have pups, indeed! And was she then no more to him than a circus animal? Oh, of course he was fond of her, and proud of her, but then, he was fond of them and proud of them, too, and he didn't let her have her own way about things any more than he let the animals have theirs. He was masterful, was Mr. Luke, in his quiet way, and Elsie didn't like being mastered. Take the question of money, for instance. On Ashbourne's Midget Circus, after expenses had been



met, the remainder of the "nobbings" were divided into six equal shares, one for each of them. Sometimes these shares were so little that they almost had to go hungry, couldn't buy meat, and lived for days on bread and treacle, sugarless tea and fat bacon. Elsie wasn't used to such fare; she was going to have a baby, she ought to be properly nourished. So one day she said, "Didn't the Boss ought to have more than others on a show?"

And Luke had rebuked her gently, explaining that, by rights, this Boss ought to have less, not more, because, if they chose to desert him, his artistes could get twice, three times, four times as much denari on any other show. "I owe them all," he said, "they've come with me out of goodness, and when we're fiddling I won't forget it."

"Well then, the animals," said Elsie, "they're bursting with fat." And Luke had looked at her in amazement and asked her if she wanted him to starve the animals.

And then she had cried, and protested that bread and treacle made her feel sick, and Luke, though he had taken her in his arms and comforted her, had suggested that she should try bread without the treacle. "It's good food, is bread," he said, "that and fresh air."

Elsie felt that it might have been better to try gunpowder, if necessary. Or at least to have waited to see if it was necessary.

For a little while the unexpected delight of Luke's perfect love-making had made her feel that the hazardous and wearying existence of a showman's wife was worth it. But now her body was sick, she didn't want a lover, she didn't even want a baby, she loathed the ugly swelling of the body she had been so vain of. So what was left but the continual grind of their daily life: rising before dawn, packing, moving, settling in, putting up the tent, showing, pulling down the tent, snatching a few hours sleep, rising before dawn again? They must always start very early, for the journeys were done at a walking pace, and a horse's walking pace is slower even than a man's. When they came to a hill, the horses must be unhitched to help one another up with the loads. Even Dolly must add her small amount of willing strength to the business of dragging the wagons up hill.

Sometimes, for a few days, they joined a fair in one of the larger towns, and then it was not merely two performances a day

but as many as could be crowded in, one show no sooner ended than another beginning, for as long as Herman's antics and comic conversation, or the sight of Judy and Draggles jumping through coloured hoops on the raised platform outside the show, could coax an audience inside. Hard days these, for all of them; though, in a way, less distasteful to Elsie, because, whilst they stayed on the fair-ground, she was, at least, spared the misery of a too early rising.

But how far, far away, how pathetic and yet faintly ridiculous, seemed to Elsie those days when she had prattled gaily of being a circus queen with a star in her hair! Circus queen indeed! She was nothing but a drudge, she was the least important member of the little community, the only one who was not necessary to the existence of the show. The show? It absorbed all Luke's time, all Luke's energy, and with a childlike faith in their interdependent destinies, he expected that it should absorb Elsie. He talked already about the time when he would be training their son or daughter to perform the trick of "knees up" on Dolly. "Serve him right," thought Elsie, in an excess of irritability that was due largely to exhausted nerves, "serve him right if it ain't his child, at all, and has a narrow ugly head the shape of Bertie Wainwright's."

Judy crept under Luke's wagon one sultry morning and produced four blind little pig-like objects which changed, in a week or so, into four enchanting balls of white fluff. Luke said, "Oh, see, Else, here's four more acrobats!" Dolly absented herself from the ring for a day or so, and produced a long-legged, rusty-coated, dainty-headed foal. Luke said, "He's a beauty. We'll not have him cut, we'll keep him to breed from. We'll gentle him from the beginning, so's he won't never be rank." And Herman took Promise-of-the-Ring (as Luke, in memory of his first efforts at horse training, called the foal) up in his arms and introduced him to the crowd gathering for the day-show as "our youngest performer but four hours old and a star already."

"And the best, last," said Luke, regarding Elsie's increasingly ungainly figure with his strange, darkly glowing eyes. "Oh Else, I can scarce bear to wait for it!"

Elsie's baby was born in September. It had been a scorching hot summer, but the weather broke early, and the rain drummed

on the wagon roof all the time Elsie was in labour. She was in labour for a day and a night, and the noise of the rain made her feel as if she were lying under Niagara in an egg-shell that would break at any moment. She lost control of herself and screamed with pain, and Frieda had to leave the ring to attend to her.

"You'll frighten every one away," said Frieda.

But Elsie paid no heed, she declared she was dying and screamed louder, though the beating of the rain on the canvas prevented her screams from penetrating inside the circus tent, except to the ears of Luke, who, as he exchanged shouted back-chat with Herman, and gave Dolly the office, seemed to feel Elsie's screams and pain tearing through his own body. Owing to the weather the audience was very small, Luke shortened the programme, left Otto and Alphonse and Herman to pull down, and ran to Elsie.

"Is it that bad, Else," he asked tenderly, "is it that bad?"

She made no effort to be brave for his sake. At that moment she felt that she hated him, because it was his fault that she was bearing a child in these outlandish circumstances, like a gipsy or a savage, lying in this horrible din of rain under a patchwork quilt in a stuffy wagon that smelled of lamp oil, without a proper nurse to attend to her, without the chloroform which she felt, by this time, should surely be administered to her. Frieda, who was laying hot cloths on Elsie's stomach, said, "I think we had better have a doctor, now."

Luke hurried out and called to Herman. He came back with his hair dripping, and the smell of his wet clothes mingled with the smell of the lamp oil. Herman ran down the village street and returned with the doctor. The doctor examined Elsie, beamed at Luke, and said he would come back in a few hours time.

"I can't wait till then, I can't!" wailed Elsie.

"My good young woman, you will have to," said the doctor, as he buttoned up his overcoat.

Luke sat up all night, distressed and puzzled. It was not like this he had imagined their child would be born. Pain, yes, that was to be expected. But wasn't there something, some spirit of gallantry and endurance, that could lay a finger on the lips of pain, and bid it smile and take courage? He had lived in the presence of that spirit for the last six years; he had seen it look

at him out of the eyes of Anna when she fell from the flying trapeze, had heard it speaking from Barnaby's blue lips when he staggered up from the grass by the roadside, had known it present in the wagon with old Sam when he died, and in the ring with his sons and daughters, when they carried on with the show, and smiled through the stupor of their grief. Again and again, in the ring and out of the ring, whenever accidents happened and things went amiss, and pain, whether mental or physical intruded its unwelcome presence, that other Presence had been there also, smiling at pain and saying to misfortune, "I am greater than you." What had happened that it should fail Elsie now, that he could not, with all the strength of his desire, and all the passion of his love, invoke it to her aid? He knew Elsie was not dying, though she told him repeatedly that she was, but he suffered in her suffering, and in the consciousness that she was somehow wilfully driving away from herself the spirit that can change suffering into triumph.

"Think of when it will be over, Else," he told her. "Think of to-morrow, and our baby."

But Elsie whimpered that she couldn't live till to-morrow, and sobbed, as she clung to him, that she wanted to go back to Whitfield.

The baby, a girl, was born in the early morning, and it was scarcely an hour old before Ashbourne's Midget Circus was on the road again. Elsie lay asleep in the bunk; the baby, rocked as in a cradle by the lumbering of the wagon, slept on her arm; Frieda sat beside Elsie; Judy lay curled up on a bit of carpet by the door, licking the four pups that pulled energetically at her teats; and the rusty-coated Promise-of-the-Ring, as yet too young to follow his mother along the roads, stood swaying on his long legs as the wagon lurched, and stretched his little neck to nibble Frieda's fingers.

It was a fair, fresh autumn morning after the rain; wisps of cloud trailed across the blue of the sky, robins trilled in the hedgerows, the air was sweet with the smell of garnered corn and ripening brambles, and Luke, as he walked at the head of the stiff-kneed, stately stepping Sandow, whistled softly to himself.

"We'll call the baby Lucia," he thought. "Aye, Lucia, that's a pretty name, and promises well."

LITTLE LUCIA did not resemble Luke, but then neither did she resembled Bertie Wainwright. She was a slenderly made, fair-skinned elf of a baby, the very image in miniature of her mother, except that her large, wide-set eyes were brown, not blue.

"I wonder," said Luke meditatively, "where she gets them eyes from?" Strange, those dark, brilliantly shining eyes reminded him of Anna.

"My father's got brown eyes," said Elsie quickly. Did Bertie Wainwright have brown eyes, also? For the life of her Elsie couldn't remember.

And little Lucia had a temper. My word, she had a temper! She shrieked the place down if she didn't get what she wanted, and as, for the first year at any rate, what she wanted was always ahead of her powers of attainment, she just had to be left to shriek. She shrieked because she wanted to sit up at an age when she ought to have been content to be kicking on her back, she made furious faces in her efforts to raise herself and, failing, lay flat, purple with indignation, and screamed by the hour. She shrieked because she wanted to crawl before her legs and arms were strong enough, and when she could crawl she shrieked because she couldn't stand up and walk.

Then Luke had an idea, he took her up by the feet, as she crawled screaming on the grass, and turned her heels over head. Lucia stopped screaming then, she looked at him and laughed. Luke somersaulted her again, Lucia crowed with joy, she tucked down her head, threw up her heels and somersaulted on her own account.

"See, see, Else," cried Luke, "here's an acrobat for you! She'll be doin' flip-flaps next!"

"She'll break her neck," cried Elsie in horror.

"No, she won't," said Luke confidently, "her bones is like bits of elastic."

He was crazy over that child, Elsie thought. Before Lucia was nine months old he took her bathing in the river Dart, one Sunday. Ashbourne's Midget Circus was touring in the south that year, and doing well, too, in the small villages that didn't get many other entertainments. "It'll do her good," said Luke,

as he stripped on the brink of the brimming and sparkling river. And off came little Lucia's frock and vest, and into the water she went in Luke's arms, and when he was up to his armpits, Luke let her go, and she swam, moving her little golden arms like a dog swimming, and kicking out with her little sunburnt legs.

Heavens! Elsie, on the bank, thought she was going to faint, but it was no good saying anything to Luke, he was mad, and he had his own ideas, and he wouldn't listen to Elsie. He put the child on Dolly's back, too, as soon as she could sit up straight. "Can't you see she's got ambitions?" he explained. "Well then, we'll give 'em an outlet." And certainly Lucia did not scream, but crowed and chuckled, when Luke encouraged her to do these dangerous things.

At first Elsie was pleased to see Luke so wrapped up in his baby. He took the child off her hands and gave her spells of much longed-for peace. But by and by she grew jealous. It was Lucia this, Lucia that, Lucia, Lucia, Lucia! "I believe you like her better than you like me," Elsie said.

Luke was hurt. "What a thing to say, Else! She's your baby, as well as mine; she's *our* baby, our lovely baby!" he said, lifting the child by her two hands and swinging her round and round, as if she had been one of those pieces of wood on the end of a string that boys make whirring music with.

"Yes, she's *my* baby, all right," thought Elsie. Sometimes, seeing Luke so dote on Lucia, to the exclusion, she felt, of herself, it was on the tip of her tongue to tell him about Bertie Wainwright, only she never quite dared. Bertie! She wondered where he was, and if he ever gave her a thought. Not likely. But Elsie gave him many thoughts, for life continued to be hard and money short, and Elsie wore a faded skirt and, generally, a darned blouse, and Luke would never give her a penny to make herself look decent with.

The other day, after a successful show, when there surely ought to have been a few shillings to spare, she had said to him, "I did ought to buy myself a new rig-out, Luke. It looks bad, as if we were failing, to see me dressed in any old thing." She had hit on this argument as one that might appeal to Luke. But he had answered, "You've got your pink silk blouse and your pearl earrings, and your gold bracelet what your mother gave

you." (Bertie's bracelet!) "It's only the top half of you that shows in the pay-box."

"But it's cold by nights in the pay box."

"Then you can wear that handsome shawl Roxy gave you for your weddin' present. You look champion in it, a real circus touch it gives you."

"But Frieda wears that in the ring."

"Not till late on, she doesn't. You can put on your green coat then, nobody'll notice you."

That green coat! Eighteen months ago it had been new for "going away in," and Elsie had felt almost too smart in it, as she sat in the doorway of the gaily decorated wagon that rumbled over the moor road above Whitfield, as she sat and hummed to herself and watched Luke stepping jauntily beside Sandow, watched the spring sunlight glisten on his carefully oiled hair, watched the lithe movements of his upright body, and thought of the night that had gone and the nights that were to come, and of herself lying in Luke's arms. It had made Elsie laugh softly to herself to think of these things, as she sat in her smart green coat and watched Luke striding at Sandow's head.

But many things had happened to the coat since that spring morning. Rains had drenched it, briars had torn it, grease from the wheels had smirched it, Lucia had wetted over it and been sick on it, Judy's puppies had crawled over it, and on cold nights it had been used as an extra covering for the bed. It was faded, stained, darned, and wearing threadbare at the elbows and wrists—it was a hateful old coat. Elsie decided she would write home and ask her mother for some money. What a splendid idea! Why hadn't she thought of it before?

About a week later, when Ashbourne's Midget Circus was encamped above Canberry-on-Sea, in Devon, a triumphant Elsie came back from the post office with a registered envelope in her hand.

"Look, Luke, what mother's sent me!" She tipped the envelope against her palm, and held out three glittering sovereigns.

Luke said, "My word! That's good. And just arrived handy. There was a gipsy omey showed me a beautiful little pony yesterday, but I couldn't beat him down below six quid and I've saved but three."

"But I'm going to buy a new coat!" cried Elsie.

"No, Else, no you aren't," pleaded Luke. "Circus comes first."

It didn't, it didn't, not with Elsie. Elsie herself came first. She stormed and cried, and told him that she was browbeaten, that she was fed up, that she wanted to die, that he never considered her, that it was her money and that she was going to spend it as she wished.

Luke's lips pouted; there was an expression on his face that Elsie had seldom seen, but which Lilian Castle would have said was the expression his face most usually wore, a sombre, clouded, withdrawn and brooding expression. "Have it your own way, then," he said quietly, and turned on his heel and left her.

Elsie had it her own way. She took a trip to Torquay, leaving Frieda to manage the pay-box. She came back in a new Wedgwood blue coat trimmed with bands of white silk braid, and, before she left Torquay, she went down to the harbour and tied up some stones in her green coat and threw it with all her force into the sea.

"I don't like that braid," said Luke, when she came home, and that was all he ever said about it.

The winter before he had been lucky. Tommy Beckett was running a winter circus at Blackpool, and he had made an offer for Luke and Otto's perch act, for Luke's low-wire act, and for Herman as entrée clown. The pay was good, Tommy was doing well, and Luke and Otto and Herman had been able to save. Putting their savings together, they had bought between them a handsome cream-coloured mare, "a lady's mount" as the horse dealer had explained to them. Topaz, as they christened her, was not trained to the ring, and therefore not as expensive as a fully-fledged rosin-back. But she was docile and intelligent; with Dolly as leader and guide they trained her, and now she wore a collar of bells, and dashed through the Cossack act with Herman, as to the manner born.

"We're getting on, eh?" said Otto with his slow smile.

"Aye," said Luke, "we shall grow big in a few years, and all I ever have will be shared with you, cul."

"And all I have with you, Boss," answered Otto solemnly.

"For you I have deserted even the Fatherland."



When Otto first came to Beckett's Circus, he had intended to remain in England only until he had saved enough to pay for his journey home to Bavaria. An orphan, with no near relation, except Frieda, whom he had not then seen for many years, he had been brought over with a troupe of young acrobats by a manager who had swindled and deserted them. Then, for a season, he and a Russian boy had obtained an engagement for their perch act with Bright's Circus, and the season was but half over when the Russian boy, who was top mounter, had fallen and broken his neck. So then Otto, very down on his luck, had travelled from fair to fair with a boxing booth, and it was in an East-end boxing ring that Frieda had found him and brought him to Beckett's. Otto's was a simple and sentimental nature; on days of blackest luck, when he had nothing to eat and no money in his pocket to pay for a night's lodging, he had conjured himself into a mood of high yearning and melancholy rapture by singing to himself old German folk songs, learnt as a child when he travelled through the Fatherland with his father and mother, who were renowned for a daring rope act which, one tragic day, had cost them both their lives. Tramping the London streets in the winter before Frieda found him, Otto had sung tears into his eyes and, occasionally, coppers from pitying passers-by into his pockets. "I will go back to the Fatherland, I will go back," Otto had said to himself. "I will put penny to penny and go back," though what prospect the Fatherland held for him he could not have told you.

And then at Beckett's he had met Luke, and admired Luke, and every day as they practised and worked together, had come to admire him more and love him better. It was necessary to Otto's nature that he should have something to worship; first it was a patriotic ideal of the Fatherland, then it was Luke. The ideal of the Fatherland receded into a kind of golden haze at the back of his mind as the ideal of Luke came to the fore; as he truly said, he had deserted the Fatherland for Luke.

The love between these two was a further irritation to Elsie. She thought it wasn't natural; women might love each other like that before they were married, she thought, but not men, either before or after. Men should only love women, it was soft to be so devoted just because you worked together in the ring and

admired each other's splendid bodies and the tricks those disciplined muscles were capable of. Luke should love only Elsie, and regard the rest of his troupe merely as employees; Otto should look up to Elsie with a hopeless devotion to which she might respond with a queenly and condescending affection. But, though Otto was certainly very nice and polite to Elsie, and always ready to do errands for her, provided such errands did not interfere with his work, it was quite evident that he placed Luke infinitely above her in his estimation; and though Luke loved Elsie and was devoted to her, it was quite evident that he felt for Otto something nearly as deep, if different. Elsie knew that Otto never caused Luke's face to cloud over, or his lips to pout; sometimes she hated the frank, happy and understanding glances that passed between them.

She tried to make mischief.

"I saw Otto in the market place six o'clock yesterday with a girl," she said.

"Did you?" Luke, who was stitching a patch on to the soft red boots he wore on the wire, did not seem interested.

"Well," said Elsie, "you won't believe it, I suppose, but I'm *sure* she was a tart."

"What of it if she was?" asked Luke.

"What of it?" echoed Elsie. "And you so strait-laced!"

"I'm not strait-laced, Elsie. What made you think that?"

"You would be," cried Elsie, "if—" She didn't finish the sentence. "Anyway," she went on defiantly, "it isn't nice for Otto to be talking to girls like that. It looks bad. And I don't suppose it stops at talking, either."

"I don't suppose it does," said Luke calmly. "Otto is young and strong, and he's not married. He must have a woman now and again."

"Oh you!" exclaimed Elsie. "It's just because it's Otto who can't do nothing wrong. If you caught any one else behaving that way, I believe you—I believe you—I believe you'd throttle them!"

"Why Else," called Luke, as she burst into tears and walked away from him. "Come back here a minute! What's the matter?"

But Elsie wouldn't come back, she ran into the wagon and

slammed the door, and lay on the bunk face downward and cried for as long as she could keep it up, listening now and again for Luke's step, hoping he would come in and tease and pet her. But Luke didn't come in. He went on patching his boot.

That summer they had weeks on end of rain. The fields where they pitched were often swamps of mud, the tent leaked and the ring was so slippery that the Cossack act had to be slowed in tempo, and Dolly went skittering when jumping her gates one day, and fell on her knees and cut them badly. It seemed to Elsie that they were none of them ever dry, except in bed at nights; audiences were small and takings scanty, meat and butter became again impossible luxuries, they all grew thin except little Lucia, for whom Luke would have gladly starved himself to skin and bone.

"The sun will shine again by and by—yes?" said Alphonse, coughing and spitting as he sat in the rain and wind lacing up the soaked, unwieldy canvas. "Look, Boss, the great hole, we should put a patch over it before she goes up . . . I would like it if I were smoking a pipe," Alphonse said.

The hole was patched, and they had just got the tent up, when the wind, which had been teasing them and making their task more difficult, rose suddenly to almost hurricane force. Luke dashed inside to lower the neck round the king pole. But he was too late; the wind dashed inside before him, it rocked the wall-ings and lifted the roof, the half-rotted canvas billowed up, for a moment, taut as a drum, then, with a sound like a gun-shot, the roof split from end to end.

It wanted little more than an hour to showing time, for they had been delayed by the putting on of that patch. They got packing needles and twine and sat down in the hurricane to stitch, with the rain deluging down their backs and making pools under them on the sodden canvas; with the wind howling in their ears, blowing their hair across their eyes, whirling up the women's skirts, flapping open the men's coats, snatching the shouted words out of their mouths and drowning them in its own hubbub.

Alphonse coughed and stitched, Herman laughed wildly and stitched, Luke and Frieda sat silent and intent and stitched, Otto sang and stitched, though what he was singing no one could hear, Elsie wept and stitched, wept and wept, with her feet in one

pool and her buttocks in another, and her back trickling with rain. To-morrow she would have pneumonia, she was certain of it, and then Luke would be sorry, for if the rain was not his fault, it was at least his fault that they were sitting in it to repair the tent, instead of giving it up as a bad job, and deciding not to show until the weather cleared. Why must they repair the tent in the rain, why must they show in weather like this? Why? Why? The answer was simple enough. There was neither any food nor any money for to-morrow, and therefore they must show. But Elsie was too miserable and too angry with fate to be satisfied with so obvious an answer.

They had the tent mended and up in time, and they showed, and considering the weather, which remained dirty, though the storm of wind dropped almost as suddenly as it rose, they did not do so badly. Elsie did not have pneumonia, either next day or on any subsequent day, but she got piles, which was a more irritating, if less dangerous affliction.

They continued to travel westward along the south coast, and the only accident that occurred for some time was that Cracow the grizzly, who had grown so savage that they were obliged to muzzle him, clawed Alphonse's chest one day when he was showing him in the ring. Alphonse completed his act, led Cracow outside, locked him in his cage, and then fainted. And a doctor was fetched who cauterized the deep scratches and said Alphonse was lucky to have got off so lightly.

"I don't like showing that animal," said Luke, "I don't like to show naught as can't be gentled. I've a mind to sell him to a Zoo."

"No, no, we keep 'im," protested Alphonse, "he is the great draw when I wrestle him. He growls and the flatties cry, 'A-a-a-ah!' They are frightened, they think Cracow will kill poor little Alphonse, and it pleases them."

"Then we keep him only till we can afford summat better," said Luke.

"When you are the big show," said Alphonse gaily, "when you have lions to roar for the flatties, and elephants to trumpet for them, then the old grizzly will be no more a draw, then—pr'ut—" he waved his fingers, "you may *give* him away. But for the present I have a great idea. We will make Cracow gloves,

through which his long nails will not stick out, and instead of wrestling with him, I will teach him to box, *comme ça*, and *comme ça*, and if he knocks me out I will rise again."

Luke was his own advance agent. Every Sunday he and Otto set out on bicycles and rode forward with a bundle of bills and a pail and pastebrush to fix up pitches for a fortnight ahead. Luke printed the bills himself, with printer's ink and rubber moulds; it was a messy business, and he stayed up all night getting out sheet after sheet, whilst Elsie and little Lucia were sleeping. Frieda offered to stay up at night and help him, but he would not let her, and the other men had too little schooling, and too little respect for the knowledge acquired in schools, to be any use at this job. Elsie offered to help, but only after Frieda's help had been refused, and she was sure that hers would be refused also. Sometimes the "tober omeys," or owners of the fields, were unwilling to do business on a Sunday, then Luke must set out again early on Monday morning, and Frieda must drive the lorry and Otto walk by Sandow, for Elsie couldn't drive him, no she *couldn't*, and that was an end of it.

On such Mondays, it was Herman, not Otto, who bicycled ahead with Luke, for Otto's strength was needed to help in the building up of the tent. Herman was but a boy, after all, and he and Alphonse, even with Frieda's energetic help and Elsie as reluctant assistant, would have made a slow job of the settling in, if left to themselves. But Herman was a nob at bill posting, and he had less respect for law and order than Otto or Luke. Where ever Herman saw a blank wall or a smooth wooden gate, no matter whose gate or whose wall it might be, he was off his bicycle, and had his bill posted, and was on his bicycle and was pedalling away again, without so much as a by your leave to any one.

"You'll get us into trouble," said Luke, "you will that."

"God's blood!" answered Herman. "A little fine, at most. And isn't a little fine worth a full house, Boss?"

"There's something in that," Luke had to agree.

In Somerset they met trouble of another kind. A circus, somewhat larger than their own, but not so principled, and in a state continually verging on bankruptcy, cut across their route. This circus stole a march on them, and posted their bills, plastering

their own name and a date a day previous, over Luke's so laboriously printed capitals.

"We will fight them, the swine," said Otto, when, as they travelled along the road, they saw bill after bill with the words Ashbourne's Midget obliterated by yellow strips bearing the announcement Cave's Continental in bold red lettering. "I will crack open the Rum-Cul's head for him."

"And I," said Alphonse, his little eyes glittering, "will throw my tomahawks, *comme ça*, at all their bastard bodies."

"A Barney, a Barney!" cried Herman, capering in the road, "Hey Rube! and atta boys!"

"Big talk don't get us nowhere," said Luke to his belligerent company. "I ain't having me show broke up and me prads maimed. We'll have to cut out this durned county and give 'em the slip." Alphonse was inclined to consider this a cowardly procedure and Herman looked glum. But Otto, for whom Luke could do no wrong, instantly agreed with him. So did Elsie, who was terrified at the prospect of a fight, and Frieda, who was ever for peace if possible. "You're a fine one to talk of a clem," she said to Alphonse, "who spit blood if you so much as tumble on the grass."

"But with my little tomahawks," said Alphonse longingly, "I have so deadly an aim."

"Too deadly," rejoined Frieda. "I don't want to see you with a rope round your neck. Tell us, Boss, which way must we scarper?"

"Into Wiltshire," said Luke, "then we have all England afore us."

They lost three days' showing in a long slow trek northwards, camping by the roadside and giving the horses free grazing, and moving on before daylight, lest they be fined for trespass. On the first of the three days, they passed by Cave's Circus, encamped on one of the pitches Luke had booked. It was early afternoon, and there was a tidy crowd gathered at the entrance to Cave's big-top, and Luke had his work cut out to calm the tempers of his company. But he did calm them, and Ashbourne's Midget Circus held on its way, and came into Wiltshire, and neither heard nor saw anything more of Cave's Continental Circus for that season.

## V I

ANOTHER winter, with Luke, Otto, Alphonse, Frieda and Herman getting work where they could and saving a little, though to be sure Otto found saving difficult, for he had a passionate love for fancy waistcoats, pullovers, coloured socks, silk ties, and soft boots, and it was only his devotion to Luke and his desire to bring about the glories of Castelli's Circus (of which he and Luke often talked) that kept him in the straight and narrow ways of economy.

"No I will not walk down Deansgate and look in the shops," said Otto to himself (he and Luke were working in Manchester). "I will walk by the canal in the yellow fog and dream to myself that over there, behind the fog, are the noble hills of the Fatherland."

Otto was living in the wagon with Luke and Elsie, in a yard under a railway arch near the canal. There were big locked gates in the arch, and they had the yard to themselves. Luke thought it a delightful place. Part of it was covered in by the railway, so that there was always a dry place where Elsie could hang Lucia's napkins and little frocks in wet weather. Also, with the locked gates, Elsie needn't feel nervous at nights, when he and Otto were at the Hippodrome. But Elsie thought the yard a dreary and horrible place, and she didn't approve of Otto's sharing the wagon with them. Luke had fixed up a screen with a bunk on the other side of it, but the screen was very thin and it didn't even reach to the ceiling, and in the night Elsie would wake up and hear Otto's big body turning over in sleep. It didn't seem decent. Moreover, though Otto certainly slept as soundly as an infant, it felt indelicate for her and Luke to be making love with someone so close that they could hear him breathing.

"Why can't he go in lodgings?" she asked.

But Luke explained that they were saving up for next season, and that was why.

Elsie pondered. "I could have stayed home with mother,"

she said. "That wouldn't have cost anything. I wish I'd thought of it."

"Silly, there'd be none to cook for us," said Luke.

"Or I might have got an engagement in panto," said Elsie, "and earned a lot."

"You have to look after Lucia," answered Luke gently, as if he were explaining matters to a wayward child.

Elsie was tired of looking after Lucia, who, despite the ambition that Luke attributed to her, was taking such an unnatural time in reaching an age when she would be able to look after herself. Or so it seemed to the impatient Elsie. Besides, why shouldn't Elsie be working and enjoying herself, same as Luke? She had a profession, too; or, at least, she used to have. Elsie felt that Luke didn't take this profession of hers seriously, she forgot that she herself had tired of it, and had been longing to escape into affluent matrimony with Bertie Wainwright. Oh Lord! Elsie felt like blaming something or somebody.

"I don't believe it's healthy for Lucia," she said querulously, "with all the dogs—they smell so bad."

"They don't," answered Luke in surprise. "I wash 'em every week."

In the wagon with them were the six poodles—Draggles and Judy, and Judy's two sons and two daughters. Cracow had gone to Sheffield with the Lorraines, and Topaz and Dolly and her colt had been left to run in the Camershaw fields, with Marta to keep an eye on them. But Luke had brought the dogs. Judy's children were now full grown, with hard, curly coats, as white as milk, with eyes dark and almond-shaped and full of intelligence, with fore legs very straight and hind legs very muscular, with short strong backs, with long fine heads, with polished black noses, with small feet, well-arched toes and black toe nails, with tails straight and high-set, with ears wide and low-set: "Prize buffers and no mistake," said Luke proudly.

He was training them. He would have a troupe of six next season. In the yard he set up a rope ring, and inside the ring he placed their hoops and gates, their pedestals and see-saw. The yard shrilled with their barking as they jumped, waltzed, walked on hind feet with their front paws daintily flexed, as they fired pistols, skipped over a rope that Luke and Otto turned, or



leaped, two at a time, into a shorter rope that Luke skipped with, and did *salt, mustard, peppers* with him, whilst baby Lucia stood watching with critical brown eyes, and added her "Dad! Dad! Dad!" to the joyful clamour.

"Your turn now!" cried Luke, flinging away the rope and swooping on Lucia, and then he and Otto would toss her from one to the other as if she were a ball, and Luke would lie on his back, and, holding her by the hand, would balance her on the upturned soles of his feet, and tell her, as he kicked up first one foot and then the other, that she would be a Risley kid in no time.

Elsie thought. "He's a proper fool over that kid, and if he breaks her back, he'll only have himself to thank for it."

The breaking of Lucia's back was a catastrophe that Elsie daily expected. "And when it happens," she thought, "he needn't imagine I'll forgive him, because I won't." It seemed to her outrageous that he shouldn't suffer her at least to bring up her own baby in her own way.

"No wonder she screams," thought Elsie. "The poor little thing's a bundle of nerves!"

But Lucia didn't scream much, these days; only on Saturdays when Luke went off to the *matinée* and left her shut in the yard with Elsie. Then she would lie on the ground and shriek until Elsie felt demented; and once, when the yard door was left ajar, she slipped out after him and was lost, and two hours later was brought home, sucking a stick of barley sugar and perfectly contented, in the arms of a policeman. At night she was asleep before Luke went and that was one mercy, though why she couldn't stay happy with her mother, like any other baby, Elsie couldn't imagine. "You'd think it was me that wasn't her parent," said Elsie to herself, and snickered at the idea. This doubt of his fatherhood was something Elsie hugged to herself as consolation whenever she failed to get her own way with Luke.

"It's in the blood, Else," Luke would say, as he watched Lucia somersaulting over and over in the yard. "Caw! Ain't she soople? Aye, that's the Castelli blood comin' out, all right."

And Elsie would smile a narrow smile, and think to herself, "Oh, is it?"

For, as the days passed, and the need to think otherwise dwindled, she became more and more convinced that Lucia's father was Bertie Wainwright. "Or else she came a full fortnight before her time," argued Elsie, "and why should she have?"

After the Manchester engagement was over, they went, with some of the company from the hippodrome, for a month to Newcastle.

"I'm real sorry to leave this yard," said Luke.

Elsie wasn't, Elsie was glad, but Newcastle proved worse. It rained all the time, and they lived in a place called Huckster's Yard, where there were at least a dozen wagons beside their own. Lucia had plenty of company, but Elsie remained on her dignity; the women in the other wagons had "dirty ways" according to her. Then an epidemic of measles spread among the children in the yard and Lucia caught it, and, though she was not very ill, it was all a terrible nuisance.

They returned to Whitfield early in March, and Luke immediately set about overhauling his properties.

"We'll have to make do with the tent for another season," he said, when he and Otto and Alphonse and Frieda had held a meeting and counted up their small joint capital. Elsie was not present, she had gone to visit her mother, but Marta was there, sitting by the stove with Lucia in her lap, swaying her knees in a soothing rhythm that made Lucia feel drowsy, and holding out the child's little bare feet to the fire.

"There's paint and that to buy," went on Luke, "and some new ring costumes, and a trampoline." He glanced round the table at the assembled company. "You folks ain't bound to me, you know," he said; for it seemed to him that he was keeping them in penury.

"Where you go, I go," answered Otto quietly.

"And Frieda and I are so very content," said Alphonse, putting his arm round his wife. "We are attending the day when we will all be famous," he added with a captivating smile.

"And having found my little brother," interposed Frieda, "who for ten years I had not set my eyes on, do you think I have any wish to part from him again? In all the wide world, Otto and I have no kinsman left but one another."

"Say Boss," asked Herman brightly, "will I do for a pretty young lady this season again?" He stood on tiptoe and brushed his head against the springing arch of the wagon roof. "Tentin's healthy," he grinned. "The pretty young lady 'ave growed."

Luke's heart felt burdened with the weight of his love for them. They were so good. How did they come to be so good? But in a few years he would reward them all.

Marta gave a sniff. "Will that old tent keep out the parni?" she asked abruptly.

"With patching—it may," answered Luke.

"Patching rags is poor policy," said Marta, "and then there's seating."

"Aye," said Luke, "we might buy some planks. But it would mean another lorry and an extra prad."

"There ought to be a gov'ment fund to help circus artistes," said Marta. "What's their idea? They pay hard-tops to sit'n yawn, doin' nowt in their houses of lords and where else, and folk as can do summat and do it well, is left to get on best way they may. If that old brother of mine hadn't done such a durn silly trick as give away his all—hey, wait a minute, wait a minute—Luke, take the child—" Marta got up in great excitement, bundled Lucia into Luke's arms and hurried out of the wagon.

In less than five minutes she was back again, brandishing a blue woollen stocking that bulged oddly as if it had been filled by Father Christmas.

"Until this blessed hour I'd forgotten clean about it," said Marta, as she laid the stocking triumphantly on the table. "I found it in his stocking after he died. He must have been crackers, indeed," thinks I, "when he took up the game of hoarding. And with that I bundles the stocking into me chest and thinks no more, for I had me 'nuity, and I wanted for nowt. Eh, Luke, lad, I'm main glad the old feller was crackers enough to do it, for this here wouldn't have brought him no good, God rest his troubled soul, as I've no doubt He will, for Erzebet's sake."

Luke stared at the stocking. They all stared at the stocking.

"What is it, Gran'an?" asked Luke, with a catch in his voice.

'Tis Marta Castelli's 'vestment in Lucio Castelli's Circus,

as is to be," crowed Marta. " Shake it out, lad, and let's count the dibs."

" You shake it out," said Luke, for he felt his hands beginning to tremble, and he did not wish to shame himself before the company.

Marta held up the blue stocking by its toe. She shook, and, with a gay chinking, a stream of gold and silver coins pattered out on to the table. They held their hands against the table edge to prevent the coins rolling to the floor. Marta shook and shook, and more and more coins pattered on to the pile.

" It is the wealth of the whole earth!" cried Alphonse. " I pray the great Castelli to stop her rain of riches before I swoon!"

Marta gave one last shake, and cuffed Alphonse across the face with the empty stocking. " That'll revive you, then," she said. " Reckon it up, Luke."

They made the half-crowns into piles, and the five-shilling pieces into piles, and the florins and the shillings and the sixpences and the threepenny bits and the half-sovereigns and the sovereigns into piles. Marta called them madza-caroons, tusheroons, half-dollars, biancs, kyes, thrums, half-beans and yellow-boys. When the coins were all sorted, Frieda and Luke counted. The sum amounted to nearly two hundred pounds.

" Ho! Ho!" said Marta. " We can do without the gov'ment, this time."

" Ashbourne's is rich, rich," said Alphonse, " it will have a new tent."

" And good seating," said Frieda.

" And a slap-up lorry with two new prads," said Herman.

" And some Arab liberties," said Frieda.

" And maybe a little lion or two," said Alphonse.

" And monkeys and a handsome show front," said Herman.

" And a new wagon for the Boss," said Otto, glancing at Luke, " for this is not near good enough."

Luke said nothing. He sat with his hands resting quietly on the table, with all that unimagined wealth ranged close to his hands. His face was very white, his eyes veiled and unseeing. Somewhere, deep inside himself, a child called Luke was sobbing, sobbing with joy and gratitude. But a man may not do such things, so Luke sat quietly with his hands on the table.

Later, when Marta had gone back to her own wagon, he followed after her, and said, "I couldn't thank you afore them all, Gran'an."

"I don't want no thanks, lad, 'tis my investment."

Luke drew a deep breath. "One day I will repay you a hundred-fold," he said.

"Pooh! I don't want no repayments, nuther," said Marta. "And may the Lord prosper thee."

"He will, I believe," Luke answered, not vaingloriously, but with a conviction that his life-long imaginings were too vivid, too concrete, too founded in some deep faith not to materialize. "I've always believed it."

"That's the spirit," said Marta. "Though there's ups and downs ahead of all, and there's no end to the ups, nor yet to the downs, till we've travelled to our last tober."

## V I I

OLD LUCIO CASTELLI'S hoard didn't stretch to all the fine appurtenances that the little company, in the first flush of finding themselves possessed of it, pictured. They sat up most of that night, chatting of all that could be done with the money; but Luke, determined not to let the excitement of his new fortune run away with him, thought long and deeply on how to lay out the money to the best advantage, and did nothing for several days except study sale catalogues and auction lists. Then he saw in the *World's Fair* that Cave's Circus, which had started with a grand splash the year before, and had been struggling through an unsuccessful winter season at a south coast watering-place, was going into liquidation, and he took train and attended the sale and came back with horse tent, big-top, seating, and two chestnut liberties.

"I got them reasonable," he said, "There wasn't much biddin'."

The company were inclined to gloat over the thought that it served Cave's right, but Luke remembered Marta's wise saying about the ups and the downs. "There's many good, fail," he said, "and many not so good, spring up."

"But these were not so good, and down they went," said Alphonse.

Luke said, "We're not crowin' yet."

He believed in his destiny, but it behoved him always to walk with circumspection.

"We have now seven prads and a little one," said Otto thoughtfully. "We shall need another man, Boss."

"Aye, we shall. "I've thought on that."

Luke put an advertisement in the *World's Fair* for Walter Orde, and he came, leopard skin and all, secretly delighted to be once more with Luke, whom he considered always to be his protégé, but grumbling, as usual; making withering remarks on the smallness of the concern, and implying his great condescension in joining it. Luke took him into the Camershaw fields to look at

the stock. The pony Dolly pricked up her ears, whinnied and came trotting at Walter Orde's whistle.

"They've more sense nor human beings any day of the week," observed Walter Orde, smiling, despite his determination not to, as he patted Dolly's thick-coated neck. "We'll have some of this fur off, though, afore we're many days older," he said, as he ran his hand over her winter-roughened haunches. "Gor blimme, she's shapeless as a barrel with a bearskin happened round it!"

He took the little head of Promise, Dolly's two-year-old son, between his hands, lifted its eyelids, examined its mouth, felt its legs, and said it was none too bad. He held his palm to Topaz' mumbling lips, took her forelock, trotted her a few paces, and grunted that she might be worse. He clapped the two young chestnuts, said, "See that?" when they winced and tossed their heads, shook his own head and opined that they were over-skittish, but that he would soon bring them to hand, and that then they would make a pretty enough looking pair.

"But as to them other three," said Walter Orde, with a comprehensive gesture of disgust towards the stately Sandow and Alphonse's elderly piebalds, "I've seen things the like of them come out of old sofas."

"They're good pullers," said Luke.

"And who should know that but me?" asked Walter Orde gloomily, "me as have harnessed 'em, and unharnessed 'em, and watered 'em, and bedded 'em, and coddled 'em, and exerted meself for 'em, and put up with their mardy ways for years upon years, when I ought by rights to have been ridin' in me own moto'? Be off, you old scarecrows!" he exclaimed, as Sandow and the piebalds came snuffing his fingers. "Beggin', as usual, of a chap what's not much better'n a begger himself."

But he was pleased that they snuffed his fingers and remembered him, that was quite evident.

Indeed, he was so far touched at finding himself amongst old friends that he offered to play the cornet for Luke. "Provided, of course, you've got no swell bandsmen," he added.

"We haven't no band, at all," said Luke, "only a hand organ."

"And you expect prads to work to an organ!" said Walter

Orde disgustedly. "I'm surprised at you. See here, young Boss, if that Otto or that Herman, whichever's at liberty, took turns on the French horn, you'd be fixed up, what with my cornet. I don't mind doing a bit with the drum and triangles, neither. I'm a band all on me own, I am, if I put me mind to it."

"It's a good idea," said Luke.

"I should think it was a good idea," rejoined Walter Orde testily, "and an idea as wouldn't be practical without me, I'm telling you." Walter Orde was becoming more and more pleased with himself. He realized that there would be no "Hey! You!" with this young Boss, and it did his soul good to speak disrespectfully of "that Otto and that Herman." On this show he understood that they were all going to be equals. Not that the young Boss wasn't going to have his own way. Walter Orde was no fool, and he recognized the quiet determination of Luke's character. But there was a difference between saying "do this and do that" with authority, and swearing and hollering at people like some Bosses Walter Orde would prefer not to name.

"And when do we start tentin'?" he asked.

"Monday week," said Luke, "and we have a practice every day in these fields, till then."

So Whitfield had the excitement of seeing Luke's striped red and yellow big-top go up in a field behind Camershaw Road. The weather was chill and there was a north-east wind blowing, but that didn't prevent Camershaw suburb from gathering in force to watch Luke and his company at practice. Children came pelting home from school, with red noses and tingling fingertips, and raced one another to be first in Camershaw fields to see the circus. Little boys played truant, and their not-quite-so-daring little sisters envied them, even if they *were* destined to get the cane next morning. Old men stood at the entrance to the big-top with eyes winking and tear-filled from the blustering north-easter. Luke hailed them from the ring and called them to come in and be seated. (He had put up the seats to be certain they were strain-worthy and in good order). Factory hands from the alleys round North Street came in the dinner-hour. Scory Appleyard came with a daffodil in his cap, and remarked to Luke that he'd a mind to take up circusing himself.

And one morning, Mr. Whale of the livery stables put in an



appearance, and told Luke he'd never seen a finer little mare than Topaz, nor a prettier stepping pair than the two chestnuts. "You'd do well to smarten up their harness a bit, though," said Mr. Whale, "if a mere outsider may be allowed to make a suggestion."

He spoke quite respectfully, did Mr. Whale, almost as if he regarded Luke as a being of a higher order than himself, for he had always held circus people in high regard. "In your line of business a good appearance is half the battle," said Mr. Whale apologetically.

"Aye," said Luke, "we'll smarten 'em up. I intend to."

Altogether Luke's activities in the Camershaw fields were watched with interest and approval. But Lilian Castle drew down the blinds in her back rooms, because she "couldn't bear it."

Luke put an advertisement in the *World's Fair* for an equestrienne, and he got a great many replies. But, after interviewing some of the applicants, and giving others a trial in the ring, he dismissed them all in his mind as "second-raters." Some were pathetically old and stout, some were pathetically young and ambitious, but without an ounce of talent. Perhaps it was not to be expected otherwise, first class artistes did not apply for jobs on a little show like Ashbourne's. But Ashbourne's, little though it might be, did not intend to put up with poor work.

"I'd rather keep on with Miss Irene," thought Luke, "and give the flatties something worth looking at." Though Miss Irene was growing somewhat lank, and the muscles of her manly calves were even brawnier than last year. Still, if it was a question of choosing between talent and appearance, then "Give me talent every time," thought Luke.

But, on the Sunday before setting out, when he had almost given up hope, he got what he wanted. Two young Irish girls, Cathleen and Rosie Callaghan, aged eighteen and seventeen, came into Marta's yard and asked for Mr. Ashbourne. Cathleen and Rosie had dark hair and grey eyes, they were pretty and bold-looking, and very shabbily dressed. Rosie had a shawl over her head, Cathleen wore a torn jacket, their high-heeled boots were beyond all patching and (though this was not apparent at the time) their black woollen stockings were footless. But they came

of true circus stock; they had been working for their uncle, they said, but he had gone to the bad through booze. They had come over to Liverpool with some idea of going into domestic service, but no mistress would look at them. "We not having our characters in our pockets, ye see," explained Cathleen with wide-eyed frankness. "But if ye'll give us a thrial, it's ourselves will be satisfying ye entirely."

Oh, yes, they could ride, do a low-trapeze act, anything. "Ye had to turn to and do what was asked of ye in a show like our uncle did be having," said Rosie.

Luke took them into the Camershaw fields. The new tent was down; together with the seating it was already packed on a new lorry which was to be drawn by Topaz and the chestnuts and driven by Walter Orde. But the impress of the ring was plain to see on the wind-bitten grass. So Cathleen flung off her jacket and kicked off her boots and mounted on Topaz and showed Luke what she could do; and after her, Rosie flung off her shawl and kicked off *her* boots and showed Luke what *she* could do. And both of them, then and there, won Luke's admiration.

What girls they were! Mad young things who didn't give a curse whether they were wrong side up or right side up on Topaz' cantering back, or whether their bloomers and their stockingless feet were exposed to Luke's view, or no.

"You'll not be having a low trapeze, now, your lordship?" asked Rosie when the riding display was over.

Saucy too; they were, and amused to find themselves being interviewed by so young a Boss. "Is it married at all ye are, me darlin'?" asked Cathleen.

Yes, Luke told them, he was married, and Rosie said that was the worst bit of news she'd be after hearing for a long time; but Cathleen said hopefully that she supposed there were others on the show that were single?

Luke wouldn't say yes or no to that, he returned to matters of business, and announced that he would like to engage one of them. "I'll leave it to you which it's to be," he said, for they seemed to him both equally talented and equally attractive and therefore equally suitable.

"But ye'll not be after separatin' us," said Cathleen, dis-

mayed. "And her and me havin' kipped together since the hour she was born!"

Luke explained that Ashbourne's could scarcely support two of them.

"We eat no more than the robins theirselves, and they pecking up the wasted crumbs," said Rosie. "And on Callaghan's show it was not so much as crumbs we'd be gettin' at times. One wage will do for two, and one kip'll do for two, but if you're after turning us away now, where shall we go?"

Since Luke couldn't answer that question he engaged them both. Then there was the question of where they should sleep. Luke thought they might kip in the wagon along with Elsie and Lucia, and himself share the horse tent with Walter Orde. But Elsie wouldn't hear of it. The proprietor of the circus giving up his wagon to two girls that were no better than gipsies! "Have you no respect for your position?" she asked him. "Besides," she said, and her eyes deepened most attractively, "I like sleeping with you, Luke. We've had Otto all the winter, and now we should be alone."

"Oh, Else!" Luke's arms were round her, he was warm, passionate, tender. Elsie might be wayward, odd times, and difficult and incomprehensible, but she was his woman, the only one he had ever wanted, or ever would want, and she was to be the mother of many children for Castelli's Circus.

He bought a second-hand bell tent for Cathleen and Rosie, and two stretcher beds, from a sale of surplus army stock. He also fitted up a low trapeze, and handed the very last shillings out of the blue woollen stocking to Frieda that she might purchase material wherewith Cathleen and Rosie might make themselves ring costumes, for they hadn't a rag nor a stitch other than the dilapidated garments they arrived in. And when he saw them, dressed exactly alike, in pink shorts (which were considered very daring for those days) and spangled tunics, going through dislocations on the trapeze, their slim, boyish figures precise in every movement, their pretty faces alive with animation, he blessed the good fortune that had sent them his way. They were merry, they were amusing, they were independent, they asked no one either to put up their tent for them, or to take it down. They were ready to give a hand with anything, from pulling down the big-

top to grooming the horses. They teased and flattered Walter Orde into grudging smiles, he referred to the pair of them as "They Baggages," but his eyes brightened when he spoke of them. And they hung about Otto to that stolid young man's discomfiture and the amusement of every one else. But they were not "tarts," far from it, and a man was over-familiar with them at his peril. Altogether an asset to the company.

Cathleen and Rosie told Luke that their tent was "heaven itself," and when he explained to them the co-operative system on which Ashbourne's Circus was run, each of the company taking equal shares in the profits, they said they would pray for him every night and every morning, for he was sure the blessed Saint Patrick himself come to walk the earth again.

That year they prospered. Ashbourne's began to make itself known in the circus world as a show where talent might be looked for. Food was better, money less scarce, Elsie was happier and consequently more charming. It was not so bad, after all, this life, when you got accustomed to it. She was jealous, of course, of Cathleen and Rosie, though she knew well that, except as artistes whom he could be proud of, they meant nothing to Luke. Still, they could be used conveniently as sticks to thrash him with when he crossed her. "You wouldn't say that to Rosie," or, "You always let Cathleen have her own way," protests which seemed to Luke so absurd that he scarcely listened to them.

They had not been travelling many weeks when Elsie found herself again with child, and when she told Luke he looked at her with as much awe and gratitude as if she had announced that she was about to present him with the Kingdom of Heaven. And realizing then, for an instant, what she meant to him, her spirits soared up into a mood of condescension in which she could afford to feel tolerant of everybody, even of Cathleen and Rosie.

"But I won't have my baby in a wagon this time," she said to herself, "like a pig in a sty."

She didn't. Elsie's second child was a winter baby, born on a snowy January morning. Elsie was at home in her mother's house, and Minnie Hunt rose splendidly to the occasion. Elsie had the best bedroom, a doctor, chloroform and a monthly nurse, and the baby, a boy, was dressed up in the lawn and lace, and the tiny embroidered barrows that Elsie had worn when she first saw

the light. Minnie Hunt dandled the baby on her knee and said he was a lad, and a chap and a diddums then, and Elsie lay languidly in bed with her golden hair spread across the pillow, and felt, as she watched her mother and the monthly nurse fussing over her second-born, that this was the proper way to do things.

The rest of the company were away working, and Marta was looking after Lucia, who had screamed murder when confronted with the high-coloured beaming face of her grandmother Hunt, and had struck at the face of her pale, heavy-breathing grandfather Hunt. "I want my waggin, I want my waggin," she had screamed, when taken into the Hunts' antimacassared and brocade-curtained drawing-room. Indeed she had behaved so badly during the brief hour that she remained in the house, even going so far as to first spit at her mother and then sit down and deliberately wet on the best settee, that Minnie Hunt said (and Alfred agreed with her) that the child was a little savage, and that the old Castelli woman had better come and fetch her away; which Marta did promptly, and Lucia went off riding piggy-back on Marta's bony shoulders, and turning a golden-skinned face, topped by a thick mop of flaxen curls, to frown in disdainful hauteur at her perplexed relatives.

The new baby never screamed murder, he lay and said "ah" to himself, and sometimes he chuckled. He went from one person's arms to another with good-humoured tolerance. He was a comical-faced little fellow, very like Luke, except that, as he grew, his fair fluffy hair turned dark.

Twelve hours after he was born, Luke travelled up by the night train from St. Pancras (this season he was promoted to an engagement at the Agricultural Hall). He arrived in the early morning, leaping up into Elsie's bedroom with snow on his boots, and a sharp smell of frost and foggy air exhaling from his clothes. He kissed Elsie with lips so night-chilled that they made her shiver, and he lifted the baby in its beribboned long clothes up to the ceiling, as if he were presenting it to God Almighty.

"We will call him Janos," said Luke, "for that's circus and January all in one." And Elsie, though she thought it an outlandish name, said nothing, for she had learned by this time that it was useless to disagree with him.

In London, Luke had met several of the Beckett family including Anna, who was now married to Leone. Anna, Luke thought, was more beautiful than ever; she was still as proud looking, but she was gentler, her smile had something almost wistful in it that Luke did not remember noticing before. She was still as quick and lithe of movement, but—what was the difference? Yes, Luke had it—she did not put quite so much space round her when she moved: as if her spirit had exchanged its desert dwelling for a home among other mortals. She had two little boys, Sandro and Vador, she told him, born within a year of each other.

"'Phemia minds 'em while I'm working," she said. "They kip along of her lot."

She was working the flying trapeze with Leone. They had a new catcher, she explained, a Swede, "as uncle Alf's getting past it, what with his knee an' all."

Luke, whose show did not open till next day, sat with Anna whilst she dressed. She looked well, and her figure had not deteriorated one iota by childbirth. "I'm going to have another, Moppits," she said suddenly. "I hope it'll be a girl."

Leone, wearing an elaborate coat with a velvet collar, came in. He greeted Luke with an effusion that was rather surprising. Anna sniffed. "You've been to the bevy again!" she cried sharply.

Leone put a tapering finger to his Grecian nose. "One little glass, my tiger cat."

"Last night," said Anna, "you fell into the net, and that was one little glass. A week ago you missed your timing, so I only caught the bar by a miracle, and that was one little glass. To-night, is it you or me that will break a neck?"

Leone drew himself up. His eyes burned angrily. "Neither will break a neck," he shouted. "I am Leone, I am a genius, is there any other in the world that can execute a triple somersault on the trapeze?"

"You won't execute it much longer with your *little glasses*," said Anna scornfully.

"Silence!" shouted Leone. "I will not be so spoken to!"

Anna glared at Leone. Leone glared at Anna. They both seemed too angry to speak. Leone rounded on Luke. "You

will leave us, if you please," he said with exaggerated and insolent politeness.

Luke looked inquiringly at Anna.

"Yes, Moppits," she said.

Luke came away feeling troubled. Anna was right, no circus artiste could afford to drink. But it wasn't only Leone's drinking that troubled Luke.

He saw Anna again, at a Christmas party in Tommy Beckett's wagon. Leone was not there. Roxy said, "He and Tommy have fell out." Anna seemed almost hysterically happy. She ran across to Euphemia's lodgings and carried back her two little boys in their night-shirts to show to Luke. They had the perfectly formed features of Leone, and the hair that curled in tight rings on their shapely little heads was dark with tawny lights in it, like Anna's. They resembled two holy children in a Leonardo painting, but the similitude, naturally, could not occur to Luke.

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## VIII

THAT spring, Ashbourne's (the "Midget" was now omitted from the bills) set out in high hopes. Tommy Beckett's circus was in Ireland, Anna and Leone with Jack and Alfie in Scotland, Norman and Dolf and Andrew were touring the east coast, Cyrus was in Wales. Luke and his company made their way southward into Devon. Luke had an ambition to try his luck again in the south-west, now that he had a more presentable show. He had two extra workers this year; with Walter Orde they formed a three man band, they were also tent men, and made themselves generally useful. The principle of share basis extended to these new hands, also, though Elsie said it was perfectly ridiculous. "You're worse than a Russian anarchist," she said, "with your crazy theories."

"It ain't no theory," answered Luke. "Ashbourne's is doin' well, leave it at that."

He had another rosin-back, Victor, a broad-backed round-crouped serviceable roan, more heavily built but not so handsome as Topaz. The two chestnuts, Flame and Amber, had at last got harness worthy of them, and Luke was training Dolly's son, Promise-of-the-Ring, a coal-black spirited little three year old, whom, true to his word, Luke had not gelded.

Cathleen and Rosie were again with them; they had much the same programme as the year before, but with various new tricks, for Luke was not one to allow anybody to rest on their laurels. In addition to the wrestling, which Alphonse refused to give up, arguing that, if Cracow clawed him, it was his own fault for not getting in close enough, the grizzly had been taught to box. And so far, by an agility that caused the sweat to drip into his eyes, Alphonse had avoided being knocked out by a blow from those heavily-striking begloved paws. There was also a merry trampoline act, in which Luke invited members of the audience to share.

"What, no one willing?" he would say sometimes at a day show when nobody in the audience was forthcoming. "Ah, I



see one as'll show you the way." And he would lift little Lucia from her seat by the ring-fence and hoist her into the trampoline, and there she would bounce and hop and shout with laughter, and fully appreciate the applause she won. Already she would stand and raise her hands to the flatties, when Luke lifted her down again. Already she understood the art of "selling her act" with radiant smiles and coquettish glances.

But at night little Lucia did not appear. She lay asleep in the bunk above Luke's and Elsie's, with her hand clutching a fold of baby Janos' nightgown, for she had taken baby Janos to her heart. He was *her* brother, *her* baby, her living doll, and whilst she slept, yet guarded Janos, big, rough hobbledohys from the audience bounced and shouted in the trampoline in Lucia's stead.

The first week in August, Ashbourne's was in Dartmouth, pitched on the recreation ground, close to the river. There were plenty of holiday-makers about, and Luke had decided to risk a three days' stay. One morning, Frieda took Lucia across the river on the ferry steamer. The river fascinated them both; Lucia leaned over the rail and watched the churning water, Frieda, grasping Lucia firmly by her little skirt, leaned over the rail and watched the water also. They went across and back many times, until it was time for Frieda to go home and cook Alphonse's dinner. A seagull followed the boat on their last return journey; Frieda watched it, Lucia watched it, Frieda threw a piece of the saffron cake that she and Lucia had been sharing, the seagull swooped, took the cake, furred its wings and floated, breast to white breast reflected in the clear tide.

"See how sweetly it rides," said Frieda.

"Rides?" Lucia disapproved. "It has no prad," she said.

"The river is its prad," said Frieda. "Its big, big shining prad."

"Yes, yes, its big, big shining prad," Lucia was delighted. "Lucia rides on the big shining prad, too," she said, and made horsey clicking noises at the river.

"Kim ip, theer, kim ip!" Lucia cried.

Engrossed in this interesting conversation, Frieda was only vaguely aware of voices raised in excited argument close to her. Then the word "Germany," frequently repeated, caught her

attention. Frieda had not set foot on German soil for twenty years but, like Otto, only less strongly, she had a sentimental feeling about the Fatherland. What was this about Germany?

The speakers, a doctor in the town and the captain of the ferry steamer, were moving down the deck now. As they passed out of earshot, Frieda heard the captain exclaim, "All I can say, sir, is—if Germany wants to 'ev it, let 'er 'ev it."

When they landed at the pontoon, Frieda went into Smith's bookshop to buy a newspaper that might tell her what it was that Germany wanted to "'ev."

To find any one reading a newspaper was an unusual event on Ashbourne's Circus. Carrying their own small and all-sufficing world with them as they journeyed, no one of the company was interested in what the larger, less companionable, more designing, but no more busy, outside world was up to. Otto could not read English, Alphonse could not read at all, and though Frieda had taught Herman, as a child, his letters and how to sign his name, Herman was not interested in the arts of either reading or writing; enough for him if he could spell out a circus bill.

So, when Alphonse came into his wagon expectant of dinner, and found no dinner ready, but Frieda with her elbows on the table, a frown on her face, and a newspaper spread before her, he was filled with curiosity.

"What do you read, *ma chérie*?" he asked.

Frieda did not answer him. Suddenly she began muttering to herself in German, so swiftly that Alphonse could catch nothing but a few rapid words: "Ach mein Gott!" and "Himmel!" and "Teufel!"

"What is it that troubles you, *mon chon*?" asked Alphonse, for this muttering in German was a sure sign that Frieda was deeply agitated. "Is there bad news of *Allemande*? Is the great Hagenbeck murdered like the great Lord George, or is it that Herr Julius Seeth had been eaten by Menelik?"

"There will be war, there will be war!" cried Frieda, raising her head and staring at Alphonse with great, frightened eyes. "Listen to what the paper is saying."

Alphonse listened. When Frieda had finished reading, he

said, "Yes, it seems there will be war, but that does not concern us, my Beloved. We are not soldiers, we are artistes."

"When I was a very small girl," said Frieda, "long, long before Otto was born, I was with my parents in Paris. My elder brother was a Risley kid, but I—I was nothing but a Kindchen. Then there was war, and the Germans marched into France, and the French took us and shut us up in prison."

"But why?"

"So that the Vater should not fight for the Fatherland. We were starved, the French had no food for us, my elder brother died, my mother gave birth to a dead baby, my aunt, who was with us, took an ague and died, and my uncle died likewise of a broken heart. Now war comes again. The English will put the Germans in prison."

Alphonse stooped over her and rubbed his cheek against hers. "Do not fear, mon âme. You are no longer German, ma femme."

"But Otto," said Frieda in a whisper. "They will shut up my Otto and he will starve, or die of a broken heart. Oh, to be shut up, to be shut up! How can a man live if he is shut like a beast in a cage?"

"I cannot believe the English will do that," said Alphonse, "and I have a great hunger, mon cœur."

Frieda prepared his dinner. Otto came in and Frieda told him her fears. "Before they shut me up they will have to catch me," said Otto, smiling. "We are here to-day, but to-morrow we are in another place."

In the quiet hour before the day show, the little company discussed the probability of war. They knew so little of the doings of the outside world, and they all lived in the belief that what was happening there was no concern of theirs. But here was Otto; Frieda assured them that the political situation affected Otto, and what affected Otto affected them all. It was as if a rent had been torn in the little companionable world in which they all worked and hoped and sorrowed and rejoiced together, and through the rent some dark and monstrous and threatening hand was thrust.

Luke said, "Maybe 'tis naught but newspaper talk. Wait and see."

. . . And later the paper boys calling shrill ugly news, and, later still, when all the town was sleeping, and the river flowed darkly with here and there a spear of light wavering down into its untroubled waters, Frieda, who could not sleep, drew aside the flowered window curtain and peered into the night. "Look! Look!" she whispered, rousing Alphonse. "It has begun already!"

Down the river, with a soft churring of engines, and a soft flurry of reflected lights, three destroyers were moving out to sea.

From the upper bunk came the placid breathing of the sleeping Otto. Frieda fell on her knees and wept.

Next morning there was another consultation, at which the company counted over its yesterday's takings. "If he is to go, he must go at once," said Luke, and Otto sat silent, for, when he thought of leaving Luke, he felt like a limb that is about to be amputated, and a limb can neither think nor desire, but only suffer pain.

Luke put the yesterday's takings into his pocket and went down to the pontoon. The early morning sun was gilding the river, the old houses, their roofs veiled in misty smoke, rose greyly against the pale sky. Here and there a window-pane glittered. There were very few people about. Luke came back in an hour.

"There's a steamer sailin' for Stockholm, the captain will take you. The tide turns at noon."

"And at Stockholm?" asked Otto with a sigh.

"There's circuses in Sweden same as everywhere else," said Luke brusquely. For he dared not admit, even to himself, what parting from Otto meant to him.

Towards noon he went again to the pontoon with Otto. The company would have seen him off in a body, but they feared to attract attention. Outrageous as it might appear to them, Otto was now an "enemy." They did not know how soon that ugly hand might pounce on him, to lead him away and lock him up. So they said good-bye to him in the wagons, and kissed him, and thrust little keepsakes upon him, and Cathleen and Rosie sobbed as if there were no young men left in the world.

Luke and Otto went down the green slimy steps of the pon-

toon together, and Otto got into a dinghy that was waiting there. And Luke handed him in his bundle of clothing that was tied up in a check shawl belonging to Frieda. And Otto gave Luke his hand, and said:

"I will come back."

"They say as it can't last more than three months," said Luke.

"Then in three months," answered Otto. And added under his breath, "But it is sad for the Fatherland." But that was only a sentimental reflection, for Otto now cared less for the fate of the Fatherland than for the fact that he was parting from Luke.

From the river bank in front of the big-top, Frieda watched the Swedish steamer swing slowly round on her moorings and leisurely put out to sea. There was Otto in the stern, with his arms folded on the gunwale and his face turned towards them. "Auf wiedersehen!" whispered Frieda, but she did not wave. Who knew if, even now, a police tug might not put out and give chase to her Otto? There he went, growing smaller and smaller to her sight, as the steamer moved down towards the harbour mouth. Now she could not even see his fair head because of the tears in her eyes.

Alphonse came and put his arm round her. "Only a few months," he said softly, "and that is the last and the worst that this war can do to us."

"Ach mein Gott!" exclaimed Frieda, as an apprehension of inexplicable calamity swept over her. "Ach mein Gott! If we should never see him again!"

## I X

It seemed to Ashbourne's, during that autumn of 1914, that what Alphonse had said was true. The war had snatched away Otto from them, and that was the last and worst and only harm it could do to them. But Otto was safe by now in Sweden, and in a few short months they would all be together again. His going had not even necessitated a change in the programme. The perch act of the Brothers Schiller was still performed, only now Herman was top-mounter and Luke bearer; but that made no difference to the spectators.

Small inconveniences, of course, there were; to be one man short affected them in all manner of ways, in the pulling down and building up of the show, in the management of the horses, in driving, fetching and carrying. But the two tent hands, Dick and Beany, were willing fellows, and Walter Orde rose to the occasion in his own peculiar way, grumbling over every extra task required of him, but on his mettle to prove that he could perform those extra tasks more efficiently, and in less time, than any one else on the show. And as to those two girls, Cathleen and Rosie, they were grand, they worked like men, and were daunted by nothing. Another inconvenience was that the price of foodstuffs was still rising, but this had been going on for some time, and it only meant that Ashbourne's takings would not stretch so far. Every one must be content to have less in his pocket for the present. No matter for that; by next season all this nonsense will have settled itself, Otto will be back, and Ashbourne's doing well, and in a fair way to do better. Nothing—how Luke felt it in every nerve and in every drop of his blood!—*nothing* could prevent his circus from becoming, season by season, bigger, better, more prosperous. Day by day, week by week, like a snowball once set rolling, it would gather to itself importance, weight, dignity, until it shone in all men's eyes, the most illustrious show on earth. Had he not worked for it, dreamed of it, lived for it, all the days of his life? “ You had at first a very small tent, a couple of ponies, three or four dogs, some

little gates for the ponies to jump over, and hoops and a see-saw for the dogs—" (already well past that stage). "You travelled on, you saved up every penny—" till at last, there it was at the end of the road, your dream made fact, your imagination taking to itself form and substance; there at the end of the long, long road it waited for you, your great creation, the splendid firmly-fashioned reality of Castelli's Circus.

Yes, war or no war, Ashbourne's would prosper, it was prospering. True, sometimes, what with war economies, rising prices and the general feeling of anxiety, they showed to practically empty houses; but at other times, and especially when they pitched near a training camp or a recreation centre, they were full to overflowing. People must be amused, mustn't they? More and more they wanted to be amused and forget their anxieties. Good, here was Ashbourne's, ready to amuse them.

"You thinking of joining up, any time, Luke?" asked Elsie one day.

"*Joining up!*" exclaimed Luke. "What you take me for? Crackers?"

"But they say men are needed," objected Elsie.

"To go and murder other men, men like Otto, what never did me no harm? Not me, thank you."

"He thinks of no one but himself," reflected Elsie. "How can he be so unfeeling? If I were a man——"

But she wasn't. And when she ventured to speak to Luke again on this matter of joining up, he told her that he didn't want to hear "no more about it." And his eyes clouded and his lips pouted, and Elsie longed to tell him just what she thought of him over this matter of refusing to volunteer to fight for his country—but somehow she did not dare. Elsie had become of a sudden intensely patriotic; any man who allowed others to go and fight and die for him was a poltroon—yes, that was the word. It made her hate herself and Luke that she did not dare tell him this—who was he that she should feel so afraid of him? But she did feel afraid of him, and the fact—a bitter grievance—lay on her heart. Why couldn't she be as saucy and outspoken as Cathleen and Rosy? They didn't care what they said to Luke, and never once, so far as Elsie could see, did what they said, however daring, bring that sombre storm-cloud expression to

Luke's face. Whereas so often now, at the least word from Elsie . . . and she was his wife, and oh, it wasn't fair, it wasn't fair!

At the end of the season, they were all back in Marta's yard, a cheerful merry company, despite a certain amount of unavoidable crowding. The horses were grazed in the Camershaw fields. Marta looked at them anxiously.

"Mr. Whale's had ten of his best prads took, lad," she said, "will he or won't he, and no permission asked or granted."

"Took?" said Luke. "Where?"

"You may well ask," answered Marta. "To fight the Belgians or whoever 'tis we are fighting. What have the prads got to do with it? Nowt as I can see. And them as is left is branded like felons on the croup with a durned great "C." Shameful that's what it is, to uglify a prad so. "C," that's short for Old Crock, ain't it? Come in the stables and I'll show you."

"But no one can touch my prads," said Luke. "They're special. They're our livin', Gran'an."

Marta shook her head. "I hope you're right, lad; but so are Mr. Whale's prads his livin', come to that."

"But surely there's all the difference," urged Luke, "between a circus prad and a hack. Any one can see——"

"Aye, lad, but the gov'ment's blind in both eyes," interrupted Marta.

It was that same afternoon, on coming out of the stables with Marta, that Luke saw his mother standing in the yard. She seemed as out of place there as her sewing machine would have been in the arena among Checko's cats; Luke was so surprised that he could only stammer, "Why—Mam!"

"I had to come, Luke," said Lilian Castle. "I know you don't want to see me, and I've not come for my own pleasure—it isn't as if I enjoyed coming—but have you forgotten that your country is at war?"

"No we haven't then," said Marta. "We was just rememberin'. Is it likely we should forget it, with every hoss in that stable branded something shameful?"

"Your brother John joined up a month ago," said Lilian Castle, ignoring Marta.



"More fool he!" exclaimed Marta sharply. "He ought to 'a known better. What's it got to do with him?"

Lilian Castle turned on Marta then. There was a pink flush on her thin cheeks, and her great weary-looking eyes shone unnaturally in the transparency of her face. "My son John has done his duty," she cried, "and I have done my duty. I have given my son, my *only* son, to Luke's shame I repeat—my *only* son—John, who meant more to me than my life, more than Heaven, more than——"

"Then you ought to have caught a hold of his coat collar and shook till you'd shook sense into him," said Marta. "Duty indeed, killin' decent folk!"

"I'm proud, I'm proud!" cried Mrs. Castle hysterically.

Marta, narrowing her brilliant eyes, regarded Lilian Castle meditatively. "You don't look proud, lass," she said, "nor nowt but durn poorly. Will you step into the wagon and I'll brew a pot of tea, for I don't doubt but what the kettle's on the boil."

"Yes, Mam," urged Luke. "It would do you good to have a set down."

"No, no!" answered Lilian Castle, who was in such a state of overwrought emotion that Luke could see the pulses throbbing in her temples, could see also a nerve twitching continually in her thin cheek. The sight of that tiny continuous twitching filled him with compassion, as if he stood watching an animal suffer and could do nothing about it.

"Do have a set down and a cup of tea," he repeated.

"And if John dies," cried Lilian Castle, "I shall be proud, I shall be proud—but I didn't come to speak to that old woman. I don't want anything to do with that old woman, it's—it's *you* Luke, I've come to appeal to *you*. Are you so sunk in—in—selfishness and degradation that—that you can't, that you won't—" Lilian Castle was panting, "that you can stay here frittering your time away with your disreputable companions, when your country's calling you, and your King is calling you, and your God is calling you, and better men than you are dying every—every day?"

"Lawks woman," said Marta, "do you want your lads murdered?"

"I want them—if need be—to lay down their lives—for their country," cried Lilian Castle.

"But I don't look upon it that way," said Luke. "It's naught to do with me."

"Have you no shred of honour left?" wailed Lilian Castle.

The three of them were standing close against the dingy red brick wall of the stables. Lilian Castle wore a faded grey coat that reached to her ankles, a grey scarf and a heavy-looking grey hat that seemed to press too tightly on her thin temples. She was all grey, all colourless, except for the faint pink flush on her cheeks and the fanatical light in her great pale eyes. Marta wore a crimson, tight-fitting jacket, and a full tartan skirt; her head was bare; under the winging skirt her feet looked jaunty and elegant in their high button boots. Luke wore mole-coloured knee breeches, a green shirt and a leather coat, his thick sun-bleached hair gleamed golden against the dull red of the stable wall.

From the windows of the workmen's dwellings that overlooked the yard, heads were thrust out; frowsty women leaned, elbows on sill, and sallow-faced men sucked at their pipes and watched, grinning; whilst down in the yard the rest of Ashbourne's company had gathered to hear what was going on. Frieda, with Janos in her arms and Lucia holding to her skirt, stood listening intently. Herman fidgeted from foot to foot, respect for the lady who was Moppits' mother warring within him against a rising indignation that any one should dare to speak so disrespectfully to the Boss. Alphonse stood beside Frieda, his little black eyes turning quickly from one to the other of the three disputants, expression after expression passing over his face, as if every word that Luke or Marta spoke were being spoken by him, and every insult of Lilian Castle's directed against himself. Cathleen and Rosie didn't know whether to laugh or to cry, it was really so daft yet so humiliating for every one concerned. Walter Orde leaned against the back of Marta's wagon, his arms folded, his features twisted into a wry grin. "Aye, this was the way honest circus folk were always treated; you couldn't even hide your head in peace in a dirty old yard but some flatty must come bursting in, screeching that you were 'sunk in degradation.'

"As if we don't know it, without being screeched at," thought Walter Orde.

Elsie watched from the doorway of her wagon. She felt uplifted with a sense of triumph, as if she was getting her own back on Luke for every unspoken grievance. A good thing that *someone* was permitted to speak their minds to him; he was hearing the truth, now, though he had not allowed Elsie to tell it to him.

"It ain't no use talking, Mam," Luke was saying. "I won't do it."

"Then may you live to repent of it!" cried Lilian Castle. "May you live to wish you had never been born, as I wish you had never been born, and this is my last word! . . . Oh yes, I'm going," she cried to Marta, who was beginning to exclaim impatiently. "I'm going at once. But before I go, I've something to give you, Luke."

She put a trembling woollen-gloved hand into her jacket pocket. "Take it," she exclaimed, thrusting something small and light into Luke's hand, "a mother's gift to her son!" Then, with a queer whimpering sound that was neither quite a sob, nor quite a laugh, she hurried out of the yard.

Luke stared in bewilderment at what he held in his hand. It was a little white feather.

From the windows overlooking the yard came a cackle of laughter, somebody began to clap, somebody else to boo.

Luke, completely indifferent to laughs, boos, and clappings, stared at the feather.

"Lord save us!" exclaimed Marta. "It's my belief your Mam's going off her chump, lad."

"What did she mean by this?" asked Luke.

Elsie ran down the wagon steps, her eyes were shining and vindictive. "She means that Luke's a coward, that's what she means!" cried Elsie in a ringing voice.

"Nay, nay," said old Marta. "That word never yet described no circus omeys."

Lucia let go her hold of Frieda's skirt, and, standing tip-toe, took the feather out of Luke's hand.

"Pretty!" cried Lucia. "See, Dad, Lucia's pretty bird!" She tilted her little face, held the feather to her lips and blew

with all her might. "Lucia's bird is flying, is flying!" she called, as the feather floated upward. "Lucia's bird will fly right away," she called, as she ran after the feather and blew it about the yard.

Seeing there was to be no more excitement, the frowsty-headed women and the sallow-faced men disappeared from the windows. The company in the yard began to disperse.

"I have shame for what has happened," said Alphonse softly to Frieda. "I am sorrowful in my heart. I will go to the wagon and sleep."

Luke looked with troubled eyes at Marta. "Why can't Mam understand," he said slowly, "that Hagenbeck and Busch and Krone and Renz and Strassburger and Seeth and Otto are Germans?"

"Because the world's gone crackers, lad, that's why," answered Marta.

## X

IN the spring of 1915, Ashbourne's was making its way slowly across country and down through Lancashire; not doing very well this season, despite Luke's firm conviction that they could and would carry on. The war had lasted for eight months now—surely, surely, it must soon come to an end. Any day now the lunatics at whose command decent folk were murdering one another would come to their senses and allow the decent folk to lay down their arms; or, if not, the decent folk would lay them down without permission and shake hands over the corpses of their brothers and return to their homes. "It can't go on," said Luke to Frieda, "unless madness is catchin'."

It seemed that it was; the war could not go on, it was too preposterous, and yet it did go on, and Ashbourne's suffered along with the rest of the world. Audiences were scanty, the food question was becoming very difficult, and there was everlasting anxiety about the horses. Dolly and Promise were in no danger, their tiny stature was their safeguard, and Sandow and the Lorraines' piebalds were safe too, age and stiffening joints protected them. But Amber and Flame and Topaz and Victor, at any moment these four, the pride and stay of Ashbourne's, might be snatched away. Already such a calamity had been threatened more than once, already Ashbourne's had been forced to change its route, and lose a day here and a day there, to avoid this town or that village where horses were being commandeered, take stealthy journeys by night, travel on unfrequented roads, skulk like felons avoiding justice, or like wayfarers with a burden of precious jewels, moving through a country that bristles with highwaymen.

No use to explain to one of these highwaymen that the animal he sought to snatch from you was an expert waltzer or thought-reader, that it could jump through hoops, pirouette, dance, walk on its hind legs, that it was invaluable, irreplaceable, an artiste in fact, and that long, long hours of skill and patience had been spent in its training. What odds to the highwayman in

uniform whether the animal could pirouette or whether it couldn't, so long as it could draw a gun carriage, or bear an officer on its back, or bleed its life out as it hung entangled in barbed wire with shells screaming round it? Luke shuddered as he pictured these things; his prads, his beautiful, satin-coated, docile, intelligent prads, that would come to his call, rub their heads on his arm, trust him so implicitly and serve him so faithfully! Was he going to hand them over to have their legs broken and their skulls split open, their bodies mangled, and their innards torn from their gaping stomachs? Not if he could help it, no, not if he could help it; and yet, sometimes, as he harnessed them, and the proud head of Topaz or Victor or Flame or Amber bowed so meekly and trustfully to the bit, he felt desperate, as a jailor who knows that his innocent prisoner's hours are numbered, and that the scaffold is even now being erected in the courtyard.

"I do admire your animals," said a lady in breeches and leggings, who had sat, a solitary figure in the best seats, watching the afternoon performance. "May I go and see them in the horse tent?"

Luke hesitated. Was this a highwayman in new guise? Would she, when she got inside the horse tent, run her hands over Victor's legs, look in Flame's mouth, pull down the lids of Amber's eyes, feel the muscles on Topaz' chest, and say, "Right, I'll take this one and that one, and the Government will pay you £30 for them"?

And yet, if so, what could he do? He looked steadily into the lady's eyes for a moment, and then something very curious happened. She actually winked at him! Luke went with her to the horse tent.

"See here," she said in a low voice, as soon as they were inside, "you don't want to lose them, do you?"

"By God, I don't!"

"You will unless you're smart about it. I know, I'm breaking horses for the Government. I've had word the A.S.C. blokes are coming through here this evening. Did you see a gate leading to a lane about a hundred yards up the Kirkfield road?"

"Aye."

"Part of my estate. The lane leads to a copse, with a notice

board, Trespassers will be Prosecuted. And beyond the copse is a common. Take these four to the common and turn them loose, fetch them before dawn and be off, and luck go with you!"

She strode out of the horse tent. Luke did not know who she was, nor did he ever see her again, but he did what she had told him to do, and did it quickly, and, an hour later, when, with a jingling of bits and a gleaming of spurs, two A.S.C. officers rode into the field, they found only tiny Dolly and tiny Promise, and stiff-jointed Sandow and the elderly piebalds, and they weren't wasting their valuable time over trash like that.

"And it's my prayers shall be rising to heaven for the tender-hearted dona, both morning and evening," said Cathleen.

"And may the saints in Paradise itself smile down upon her," added Rosie. "And if we were in ould Ireland now, Boss, it's easier in our minds we'd all be feelin'."

"I wonder could we get across?" said Luke, to whom the idea seemed a very good one.

"We can but try," said Alphonse, heroically suppressing his personal feelings, for a journey by sea to Alphonse was like dying for hours on end.

So Ashbourne's changed its route yet once again, and made towards Liverpool, and they had only been travelling two days when they fell in with another batch of A.S.C. officers and Victor and Flame were taken from them.

Lucia screamed, Rosie and Cathleen wept, so did Alphonse. Herman walked away to hide his face, Walter Orde called down curses on the backs of the officers like any Hebrew prophet; it was a sad day for Ashbourne's. Luke scarcely dared to show Topaz and Amber in the ring, he would have liked to travel night and day to Liverpool and get aboard the first ship he found there. Yet show he must, for circus folk must live, and it is no use to travel post-haste to Liverpool and arrive there with starving bellies and not a saltee in your pockets.

It was a day or two later, after the matinée, that Frieda burst into the wagon where Alphonse was washing the grease paint off his face.

"I have news," she cried, "Otto is fighting in France!"

"But for whom is he fighting?" asked Alphonse in astonishment.

"For—for the Fatherland," faltered Frieda. "*Mein Gott*, it should not be that he is fighting at all! How will he live if he comes back without one arm or one leg? Or even without the fingers of one hand? How if he's——" The words fell away into an inaudible whisper as she stared with frightened eyes at Alphonse.

"But no, but no, do not think it," said Alphonse, putting his arm round her and rubbing his head against her cheek. "The good God will not permit it. And where had you the news, *mon ange*?"

"From one of the Tommies in the blue coats," said Frieda. "The one with the thick ear and the scar on his forehead. He boxed with our Otto, once. He was there when I found Otto in London. I remembered him and he remembered me. And he said to me just now, 'Missus, I saw your brother fighting for the Bosches.' 'I do not think so,' I said, 'my brother is safe in Sweden, one soldier is very like another soldier, it was someone else you saw.'"

"'Blimme it weren't,' said he, 'for I was laying on the ground with my leg broke, and this here Bosche comes up for to take me prisoner. And he looks into my eyes and I looks into his, and he stoops over me and says, soft like, "Bertie Thomas," says he, "I have not seen you," and he looks the other way, and I drags myself off and hides myself under a pile of dead bodies, till the Bosches had passed by. And if that weren't Otto,' he said, 'who was it?'"

"Yes," said Alphonse, "it is very strange. But I think it was Otto."

"And so do I," said Frieda, and she wept with his arm round her shoulder.

"He will come back, *mon chou*," said Alphonse, "and you have me and you have Herman."

"Herman is sixteen," wept Frieda. "Ach Himmel, when will it stop?"

"Before Herman is seventeen," Alphonse assured her. He smiled, "And are you not grateful now, *ma chérie*, that Alphonse is a poor crock that is fit for nothing?"

"You!" cried Frieda. "*You* fit for nothing!" And she forgot her distress in a torrent of vehement praise.



Herman came leaping into the wagon. His face was jubilant. "We have fooled them, we have fooled them!" he shouted.

"Who is it you have fooled?" asked Frieda.

"Some gajos what come for Topaz and Amber," cried Herman. "We was leading the prads to water, and up they come. 'Let's have a look at your horses,' says one, with a face like a piggy's bottom. But Walter Orde he leaps on to the back of Topaz, and *presto!* away he goes, yelling murder. He will kill them, he will kill them he says, he will kill the man who comes near him, and Topaz she ups with her hind legs and she bucks, one! two! and down the street they go, and round the corner, and where are they now? Herman flung up his hands. "I do not know, I do not care, nobody knows, nobody cares——"

Frieda laughed. "And Amber?"

"I have a hold of Amber's bridle," went on Herman, "and the Piggy's Bottom says, 'A nice little mount for me,' he says.

"No *sir*," says Herman, "that little mare goes lame. Chestnuts are never steady on their feet," says Herman. "Rot," says Piggy's Bottom, 'I'll try her,' says he, "and up on her back he climbs, and 'gee up' says he. And Amber commences to trot. But out of the corner of his eye Herman sees that Piggy's Bottom does not sit very secure without a saddle, so Herman gives to Amber the little office and all at once she goes lame, lame, lame, and Piggy's Bottom comes off wump! on his head, and when he gets up from the ground he shouts 'Take your bloody mare away!' And Herman gives Amber the little office yet once again, and leads her off—so sad, like this, with her poor head nodding and her poor leg, going hobbledy-hop, hobbledy-hop. And when Herman has her safe in the tent he kisses her and gives her many carrots."

Luke came in and was told the news of Otto, and of Topaz and Amber.

Bad news, Otto being in the fighting line! And how did he get there? Not of his own free will, Luke felt certain. Otto, the staunch and good tempered, the mildest, kindest soul on God's earth, Otto engaged in this bloody work of murdering his fellow men! Hell, it was impossible to think of! Luke had to think of it, none the less; as if it were himself caught up in the toils of this infernal machine, he thought of Otto, what he must

be feeling and suffering out there, where his every right and natural instinct was forbidden him, where, hour after hour and day after day, the roar of the guns, the whistling of shells, the thunderous rattle of men's falling dwellings, the screams of the wounded, the groans of the dying bellowed one only command into his appalled ears, "Do your duty, kill and kill and kill!" *Duty!* Oh God!

It was good to thrust all these horrors to the back of one's mind, and to laugh with Herman over the story of Topaz and Amber.

"I've fixed up the route till Friday," said Luke, "and by then we should reach Liverpool. And we won't keep back a solitary saltee, nor give a darn whether our bellies are full or empty, s'long's we can get a ship'll put us over."

On Thursday they arrived in the small industrial town of Lenford. Only twenty miles from Liverpool! If the takings to-day were good, Luke decided they would travel through the night, cut out to-morrow's show, and ship to Ireland at once, if by hook or by crook they could find a ship to take them. Once he had left the A.S.C. peril behind, once Topaz and Amber were safe from the highwayman's clutches, he didn't seem to care what happened.

It was the second week in May, the world had just been shocked by the sinking of the *Lusitania*, when over a thousand innocent people perished. Everywhere in England the feeling against Germany was at fever pitch.

"I heard down in the bevy that they're wreckin' and lootin' all the shops in Liverpool," said Walter Orde, "and crucifyin' any what has German names."

"I don't believe it," said Luke.

"S'true. 'If you got any Bosches on your show,' says a feller to me, 'you best way take and smother the bastards.' Aye he spoke ugly, and I spoke ugly, 'Who the hell are you?' says I, 'to——' "

"Ach Himmel!" exclaimed Frieda.

"You are no longer a German, ma femme," said Alphonse gently.

"I was not thinking what I was," announced Frieda. "My heart bleeds for all the world."

But Luke reminded them that it was near show time, and that they couldn't afford to sit still watching their hearts bleed.

Considering that to-morrow, if all went well, they would be free of the hourly nightmare of the A.S.C. officers, you might have expected that the company would have felt in good spirits. But somehow they didn't. The anxiety was not over, for one thing; it would be terrible, Luke thought, if at the last minute Topaz and Amber should be taken from them, and, though he tried to dismiss the idea from his mind, with a superstitious feeling that by harbouring it he might help to bring about the very calamity he feared, yet he couldn't quite dismiss it. Also he was depressed about Otto, he kept picturing Otto lying dead, with the sleek rats crawling over him—he had heard about those rats from a Tommy in blue uniform. Frieda, too, was thinking of Otto, Alphonse of the agony of sea sickness he must endure on the morrow, Walter Orde of Flame and Victor, for whom he mourned as for two lost children; Elsie was undergoing a strong attack of patriotic feeling, which made her loathe the sight of Frieda, and hate Luke for his unnatural opinions; the only people who were normally cheerful were young Herman, and those two indomitable girls, Rosie and Cathleen.

Indomitable? Not quite! That afternoon they got jeered at for their riding act, the first number on the programme—jeered at and worse, for some rough jossers in the cheap seats called out lewd remarks as Rosie and Cathleen performed their pas-de-deux. And though in the ring you smile at such things, as though they were bouquets being tossed at your feet, once outside the ring—oh dear! Rosie burst into a storm of indignant weeping, and Cathleen swore like a trooper, and tore her *négligé* in her rage; and when that *négligé* is the first you have been able to afford in your life, and God only knows when, if ever, you will be able to afford another, your thus ill-using it proves that your feelings have been outraged beyond all control of reason.

"And it's themselves is the most dis—disheartenin' crowd of—of Jonahs—as ever—ever I worked for," sobbed Rosie. "And it's meself will not be settin' foot in that ring—never aga-a-ain."

"Oh come now," said Luke, "where's your pride?"

But they *were* a disheartening audience, something amiss with them, Luke couldn't make out what, a sullen, lumpish, ill-humoured audience. It was a full house, too, the fullest they had played to for many a long day; it was early-closing in Lenford, and it seemed that Lenford had money to spend, at any rate half the town appeared to be there. Why couldn't they laugh and enjoy themselves, then, what were they glowering about, why had they booed Herman when he ran in and performed his capers in front of Topaz and Amber, why had they jeered at Rosie and Cathleen? It seemed that the depression of Luke's spirits was taking visible shape, like a darkness creeping along the spectators' benches, as he and Herman stepped into the ring for the Schiller Brothers' perch act.

Luke balanced the steel pole. Herman climbed nimbly to the top . . . There was a murmur of voices outside the front entrance, and then Elsie's voice calling sharply, "But you can't, I tell you, you can't come in without paying!"

Some toughs outside, thought Luke as, arms outspread and body moving rhythmically, he gazed upwards at Herman's pliant young figure, stretched now at right angles to the pole. Some toughs. Well, Elsie and Walter Orde and Dick and Beany must manage it among them, Luke's business at the moment was to keep his eyes on Herman. . . .

Protests and voices louder, the band not playing—they'd gone to the entrance then—a rush of feet out there, no harm if they did get in without paying, the tent was full enough . . . Good lad, Herman, nicely, nicely! Caw, what a lad he was, you'd think he'd been born up there, instead of only—

A yell of voices at the front entrance, "Where's these bloody Huns? There they are in the ring, the Schiller Brothers, give it 'em, boys, we don't want no bloody Huns!"

Thump! Something heavy hit Luke's ankle. He started, swayed, tried to recover his balance, the pole wobbled, swung over to one side, fell with a crash, as Herman came whirling down into the ring. Not hurt, no, not by his fall, he was on his feet in a second, but a stone hit him on the arm, a walking stick caught him fair in the back, the tent was in an uproar, people were jumping down from the seats, people were flinging

sticks, stones, programmes, toffee tins. "Huns! Huns! Huns! Who murdered our women and children?"

Luke and Herman, with their backs against a king pole were defending themselves against a crowd of enraged hooligans, giving as good as they got, and better; Walter Orde was in the ring, Dick and Beany were in the ring, Frieda and Rosie and Cathleen were in the ring, hitting out right and left, snatching up ring properties and belabouring ugly mugs with them, getting some of their own back for the insults they had suffered. A barney! A barney! Though heads were bleeding and bodies bruised, it was not altogether unenjoyable.

Elsie had seized Lucia and Janos from their seats by the entrance and run with them for the police. Alphonse, who had opened the cage of Cracow's cage to muzzle him, before leading him across to the big-top for his number which followed the perch act, was, with all the ingenuity and persuasion he could muster, now trying to urge Cracow back into his cage again. In the act of putting on Cracow's muzzle he had heard the yells from the big-top, and he had dropped the muzzle and stepped quickly out of the cage again, and before he could shut the door, Cracow had pushed out after him. And here they were facing one another.

"Back, Cracow, back into your cage, mon brahve, it is not after all your act," said Alphonse.

But Cracow was not going back into his cage. With a low growl he reared on his hind legs and wagged his head from side to side; his little deep-set eyes glittered, but there was no expression in them, his face might have been made of wood, so empty was it of any clue as to what was going on in Cracow's mind. Only the low, thick growls, the waving paws, the wagging head, told Alphonse that Cracow was in no mood to be trifled with.

Sweat stood on Alphonse's forehead. He might run, of course, and shut himself in the wagon, but then, what would Cracow do? In the big-top there were children and there were women, and in the company of Ashbourne's there were many, many dear ones. No, you do not run, you get Cracow back into his cage, or you die; and if you die, you die like a true circus omev.

"In, Cracow, in, Cracow!" Alphonse moved towards the

grizzly; he had no weapon of any kind, there was not even a little stick anywhere within reach with which to threaten Cracow.

"In, when I say! Ah, you would box me then, is that what you would do, you would box for your sugar, good Cracow? I have already given you your sugar, but here is more, and more. You do not want it? Box then, box then, box, Cracow!"

Alphonse sprang, it was a chance, custom might yet convert murder into play, and any moment help might come. "Box then, box!" Leaping backwards and forwards, as if he were in the ring, Alphonse doubled his fists and buffeted Cracow; he leaped, he smiled, he dodged, he buffeted; the little deep-set eyes glittered, the thick growls continued, the heavy ungloved paws swung and struck, but not murderously, no, not murderously. As Cracow struck, the long claws tore rents in Alphonse's leather waistcoat, but they did not yet tear the skin—or if they did, here and there, Alphonse was not aware of it.

"A match, a brave match, my Cracow!" cried Alphonse as he dodged and buffeted, and in the combat, that was not yet murderous, edged Cracow back and back towards the cage. The cage door, wide open, was just behind Cracow now, another moment and perhaps——

No, as if he had eyes in the back of his head, Cracow saw what Alphonse was up to. With a louder growl he plunged forward, thrust his claws deep into Alphonse's chest, sprawled over Alphonse's fallen body, closed his jaws on Alphonse's throat . . .

"The bear! The bear! The bear!"

Some women who had run with their children from the back entrance of the big-top, were screaming. "The bear, the bear, he's killing a man!"

In a moment the battle within the tent changed to a stampede. Cracow lifted his blood-stained muzzle from the business of sucking Alphonse's throat, to see people pouring out of front and back entrances, people crawling out under the canvas, people running, people screaming. Cracow growled a thick growl, the body under his paws twitched and writhed, Cracow growled again, lowered his eyes, and turned once more to his feast.

Then something hit him on the head. Cracow reared on his hind legs, another blow, another, another, Luke, Herman and Walter Orde, battering the life out of Cracow as he reeled and staggered

and howled, Luke with an iron bar, Herman with an axe, Walter Orde with a pitchfork. The pitchfork was in Cracow's side, the axe had split his muzzle, the iron bar belaboured his skull. Reared to full height, Cracow with his heavy fore-paws clutched the pitchfork as if he sought to embrace it, the iron pole beat once more across his shallow brain, Cracow rolled over howling, and the axe rose and fell, rose and fell, till the earth and Cracow and Herman and Walter Orde and Luke were alike splashed and reddened with Cracow's blood.

Frieda took Alphonse up in her arms and carried him to his wagon.

"Mein Liebling, mein Liebling!" she moaned over him as she laid him on the bunk. He was so dreadfully mauled that he was horrible to look on, but he was still her Liebling. She kissed the bleeding wound in his throat that nothing she could do would staunch. He was still faintly breathing. He opened his eyes and tried to smile.

". . . no pain . . . chérie . . . circus omey . . . ye-es?" The whisper ended in a sigh. Rosie and Cathleen stumbled sobbing into the wagon. Frieda looked up at them. "It is—finished," she said, and swayed and fell unconscious across Alphonse's body.

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## X I

It was not a very grand funeral they were able to give Alphonse, but they did their best. The inquiries into his death and into the causes of the disturbance in the big-top delayed them for many days. During this time they did not show. Tradition or no tradition they had no heart to work; the big tent waited packed on its wagon, ready for the day when they might move on, a deep grave in a corner of the field held the body of Cracow. How Luke wished that they had disposed of him, long ago! *How* he wished it! But what was the use of wishing?

Amid such great calamities, it scarcely surprised Luke that one morning the A.S.C. "highwaymen" appeared again, and Topaz and Amber were taken away from him. Yes, take them, take them, this is the dark hour when Fate frowns and man feels almost indifferent. Anything else Fate, any other blow in store for Ashbourne's? No? Not at the moment? Then thank you, Fate, for small mercies. But if we do not move on and get to work again soon, we shall certainly starve. So it's no use, Herman, your hiding yourself in the wagon all day, and no use, Rosie and Cathleen, your crying your eyes out, and no use, Frieda, your staring with your great eyes as if you were seeing ghosts, and no use you, Boss, who ought to know better, carrying a load on your heart by day, and starting out of sleep at night, struggling and shouting and frightening your wife almost into hysterics, and waking up your kids. Get a move on; you are now free to depart from this accursed little town which, oh to God, that you had never set eyes on! Though they are not such bad people, after all, these inhabitants of Lenford. Realizing that you are not Huns, they have made a collection for you, enough to pay for the damage to your property and for the burial of Alphonse. And you have also had sixty pounds handed to you, the blood money for Topaz and Amber. (Though being mares perhaps they will be kept for breeding, and not sent to their deaths on the Western Front.) So get a move on, Ashbourne's, lay to your hearts old Marta's words, that worse calamities have befallen folk as good,



take up Fate's challenge, Ashbourne's, and refuse to be daunted.

So in due course they moved out of Lenford, and there being, now that they had lost Amber and Topaz, no reason for making towards Liverpool, they turned southward into Wales, and managed to struggle on through the summer and autumn, a little company doing its best with what was left to it, concealing grief under merry antics and cheerful smiles, but sad, sad at heart.

For the winter they returned, as usual to the Old Bell Yard in Whitfield, and Luke and Rosie and Cathleen and Herman were lucky in obtaining work, both in Christmas pantomimes and in entertainments organized for wounded soldiers. And Elsie, too, was asked to dance and sing at concerts, and that cheered her considerably, for it proved—didn't it?—that, after all, she was not yet left on the shelf. And whilst she was thus engaged, Marta and Frieda looked after the children, and that was a pleasant change for Elsie. So the winter passed, and another season's tenting began, with Ashbourne's still more depleted, for Dick and Beany had been taken away—much as the horses had been taken, dragged, willy-nilly into the toils of this deadly machine that seemed to Luke to be crushing all sense out of existence. Well, to the very last he would defy it, put his private conviction of what he lived for (to create, not to destroy) against public opinion, against his wife's now openly voiced reproaches, against the taunts that shouted at him from hoardings, platforms, newspapers, pulpits, and the suborned mouths of babes and sucklings. "What did *you* do in the Great War, Daddy?" "I remained true to my vision." What else, if his vision be single, can any man do?

But one day, Luke, in a small country post office, was handed an official envelope which had followed him from town to town and from village to village, and caught up with him at last. Yes, Boss, your King and Country want you, and they mean to have you this time. And being young and strong and as fit as a fiddle, it is no earthly use your saying "I won't go."

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# BOOK FOUR



I

Somewhere in France.

DEAR Else,

How's yourself? I am AT, though homesick for you and the kids. This is a mucky chat, all mud and live stock. But at times when the sun shines not too bad. And the boys make up for a deal. The prads are the worst, poor things, when they scream and their bowels come out. They did not ought to be here, I think men made this mess, not horses. I sleep good and don't mind the guns. Some chaps go raving. Well, they say it can't last much longer, and then we can begin again on our circus. Have you heard how Frieda and Herman are doing? I'm glad to think we gave them the poodles. They will be able to make a living all right. Frieda is a grand show woman and Herman an act in himself. I had the parcel you sent, with cake and waistcoat. Fancy all them stitches. I think of you with the needles going. I liked that you worked it for me. But never did I think I should be in a chat like this, getting parcels, or your dad baking cakes for me. Remember Lucia to practise her splits and head stands. Keep her limbs supple. Gran'an will learn her the flip-flaps if she is capable yet. The sooner the better to begin.

All the best,

Luke.

PS.—How is little Janos? I see him so plain with his grinning mouth.

If Whale has a steady prad left, maybe he would set Lucia on it.

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Dear Else,

I have been worrying about something. I was talking to a chap in the trenches, gone a bit queer in the head. He says we have but one soul between us and that was God. He says it was all the same whether he was killed or I was killed or a Bosche

bloke, like as if you chopped off different fingers of the one hand. Well I understood that a bit, just like circus goes on if a prad falls sick or a clown dies, and the clown a good clown whether Bosche or any other. I figured it out that circus isn't the prad nor the clown but something bigger and they part of it. But then I thinks it wouldn't be all the same if a madman comes in and kills half the circus for the fun of it. And that's what this war is, just killing for the fun of it. I can't get that straight in my head, I feel all in a muddle like. Why am I out here murdering and maiming? That bloke I told you of had his head blown off next minute. Well do you think that's all the same? He hadn't done nobody no harm, nor have I, nor any of us. I want to be making my circus. I don't want this mess. I thinks, I wouldn't allow no madman coming into my circus blowing fellow's heads off. So why does God in his? And then I thinks if that chap spoke truth and we have but one soul and that God, then 'tis we what's allowing it and why don't we stop it, and then I feel fair cracked . . .

---

Dear Else,

I had a woman to-night. I was ashamed after. I thought of you and the kids and how bad it was, but seems I couldn't not go with the rest. There was a lot of us all waiting our turns. I wanted to spew, too, and yet I did it. I'll try not again, it's all bloody, killing decent bodies like myself and fumbling with women I ain't got no love for. I thought I could be true to you and clean, but seems I couldn't. I don't know what's coming over me. I may do it again, next chance. I wonder how I'd feel if you had a man? Sometimes I wish I could be shot dead, but mostly I want to live and have my circus.

All the best,

Luke.

PS.—I thought I ought to tell you about that tart.

Dear Else,

Thanks for yours with Xmas gifts, but the plum pudding got snarled. Let's hope someone enjoyed it. I heard from Anna. Leone has his own show now, they are in Norway, doing good. She has four kids, and one a girl, like she wanted. Leone was clever, had papers to make out he was not English, French, Italian or what else, or his father his father, so is able to get on with the job. But George Beckett is dead, also Cyrus, and Matthew not heard of in Palestine. Alfy and Jack gone too, joined up though they needn't of, being over age. I shouldn't if I'd been them. I wonder they took Alfy with his knee. He must have faked it. Jack was one of the best Joeys ever I see. You remember his water act at Blackpool? Anna's letter makes sad reading, though where all are getting killed why not Becketts? Could Lucia put a X on your next letter? Tell her it's for her Dad. Also Janos. But I think he will have forgotten me.

Your loving husband,

Luke.

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Dear Else,

I got a puppy, a white bitch, a pretty one. I'll tell you how I got her. We come a few of us into a village what was all blown to bits and dead lying everywhere. A shell burst up over and we took cover under the lee of what was a church. I was crouched below a bit of masonry like and when the shell was done exploding I looked out. The street all empty save for the bodies, and this little puppy coming down the middle of the street. She was clean and dainty, I don't know the breed, but pretty, and she was carrying somewhat big in her mouth. When she gets level with me I whistle and she comes to me. And do you know what she has in her mouth? A piece of a man's hand. I says drop it, and she drops it and wags her rudder. So then I picks her up.

I'm training her tricks. She's cute. She jumps over my hands and walks on her hind legs when I give her the office. It gives me something to think about and maybe I shan't have to go after the tarts again. I named her Blanche which is French for a white dona. I can talk a bit of French now, which will come handy

when our circus goes tenting on the continent. You know the Bosches run the best circuses and yet we kill them. I wish I'd learned more German off Otto. I wished I knew how he's doing. I dream of a night that I've killed him off, for how can I tell one Bosche from another? I found a dying one—My God he was a mess. And he says somewhat to me. I felt sick I couldn't understand so I just says Cheerio old pal and puts my two arms about him to lift him but the blood spouted out of him and mucked me and then he was dead so I left him lie. . . .

---

Dear Else,

How is Lucia and the boy? I hope she's practising and learning him like she promised. She's a grand kid. Else, sometimes I think I'll go mad before I see you again. It's all something you'd never dream of. I'd rather be a gonner and out of it. Only there's our circus to think of.

I am in the pink as to body but sorely troubled as to mind.  
Luke.

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"What *queer* letters he writes," thought Elsie. She stuffed them away, half read, in a drawer with a good many others that made more interesting and exciting reading: letters from Tommies she had met home on leave, or whom she had never met, but felt it a duty to correspond with. "For we must cheer them up all we can, poor boys," said Elsie to herself.

The letter about the tart made Elsie feel quite indignant. "If *that's* the way he's going on—" she thought, with a toss of her head. "Men are all the same, they forget you as soon as your back's turned." But if Luke could do that and own up to it, and expect to be forgiven, why had she felt so guilty always about Bertie Wainwright? "I've been a fool all these years," she thought, "feeling I'd done Luke a wrong and knuckling under to him, every way, because of it. It'll be very different when he comes back."

"When he comes back!" Did she want him to come back?

Really, Elsie wasn't quite sure. "Of course I don't want anything to happen to him," said Elsie to herself, "but——"

No, she didn't, she honestly didn't relish the thought of returning to the kind of life they had lived together. So what was the use of pretending she did? "The war makes a lot of things plain," reflected Elsie. "You have to stop humbugging yourself and think straight. Everybody has stopped humbugging themselves, women as well as men." And as to a little matter like the Cleethorpes affair—why, people did that kind of thing every day now; it was all different from before the war when you were ashamed almost to own that you had a body.

Truth to tell, Elsie was enjoying life. She was so busy, what with sewing for the boys, and attending tea parties where every one made bandages, and singing at concerts, and getting up snappy entertainments for convalescents, and having them to tea, two at a time, in the handsome white villa her dad and mother had moved into on the wooded slopes above the Endcliffe meadows. There was no lack of money in the Hunts' establishment nowadays, thanks to the shipping shares, which were paying now nearly a hundred per cent. Alfred Hunt was only waiting till times were more settled to sell the business and live the life of a gentleman. Already he had engaged a manager, and visited the shop only once a week to go through the accounts. The rest of his time was devoted to public affairs, since he had been elected to the town council.

Mrs. Hunt said, "You'll be mayor of Whitfield in no time, Alfred. Look at the people that call on us, nowadays!"

And Alfred, whom his changed fortunes had rendered quite reckless, answered, "You better buy yourself a new fit-out, Minnie, it don't do not to look smart, even if it is war time. And if it's silk, I see a pearl necklace at Meyerstein's, and I'll make him an offer for it. Why Minnie," said Alfred, ponderously eyeing his wife's plump charms, and picturing how she might yet grace a banquet as mayoress of Whitfield, "Why, Minnie, I do declare you grow younger every day!"

Basking in such an atmosphere, with as much money as she could spend handed her without demur by an indulgent father, with the approval of an indulgent mother who wanted, even more than she wanted anything for herself and Alfred, that "our Elsie



should be happy, poor girl—" finding herself so cossetted, so pleasantly busy and so sought after, was it any wonder that Elsie should feel dubious about returning to the arduous life she had shared with Luke? She didn't even have the children to worry her, now, except when she chose. They spent most of their days with Marta, and Elsie, since she had really no time to bother with them, squared her conscience over the matter by telling herself that this was Luke's wish.

She could even make herself out a little ill-used, something of a martyr, over this matter of Lucia and Janos, when speaking of them to her numerous friends and acquaintances. "Of course it's dreadful them being with that old women so much, but you don't know my husband—he's that headstrong."

Sometimes she liked to dress up Lucia and take her out; for Lucia was, as Marta expressed it, "fairer than a fairy" and any one might be proud to show her off. But there, if the child won't behave properly when she's out with you, what are you to do? You can't show off a screaming, kicking, fiercely protesting little vixen, even if she is lovely as the dawn, and all dressed up in a blue coat trimmed with white fur and a white fur cap to match. And Janos, though he was more amenable, could make you blush by suddenly coming out with the most inappropriate language. Besides he wasn't as pretty as Lucia, and you can't dress up a boy, and she *really* hadn't time to bother with either of them. Also, it made you look older than you were, to be dragging kids about, and you weren't such a success with the officers in Blighty, either. On the whole Elsie soon discovered that the charming-young-mother rôle occasioned her more plague than profit.

"No, I shouldn't like to go back to the old life, now," she said to Mrs. Castle one day when she was having a dress fitted. "And I don't see as there's any need, either. If Luke'll only listen to reason I know Dad'll start him in a good business after the war. Dad says to me the other day, 'We must do something for that husband of yours, Elsie, when he comes home.' He's good is my Dad."

Lilian Castle, with her mouth full of pins, murmured that she would be thankful to God if Luke would settle down to something respectable. Lilian Castle was almost abjectly obse-

quious in her attitude to the Hunts nowadays. "The Hunts aren't like us, they're low really," John had once said to her. And she had agreed with him in her heart, though as a Christian she had considered it her duty to voice a mild protest. But that was before the Hunts moved into a handsome villa and Mrs. Hunt kept three servants (though it was wartime), and Mr. Hunt became a town councillor. Even Christians had to face the fact that circumstances alter cases. And Mr. Hunt was always in church on Sunday mornings, and Lilian Castle knew for a certainty that he put half a crown, and sometimes two half-crowns in the collection plate, because one of her clients, whose husband was a sidesman, had told her so. So Lilian Castle murmured, as she pinned a dart in Elsie's new frock, that it was very good of Mr. Hunt, and that she hoped Luke would listen to reason—and might she show Elsie some photos of John?

John in his officer's uniform (he had lately been made a captain) John somewhere in France, John with a crowd of other young fellows at a sing-song, John home on sick leave with his arm in a sling ("that was when I went to London to see him" explained Lilian Castle), John and his mother together at Hampton Court, John, John, John, always the same demure, tight-lipped and anxious-eyed John—Elsie felt she had no use for him, though she didn't say so to Mrs. Castle. "You must be proud of him," she said, noticing with a feeling almost of contempt, how Lilian Castle's hands trembled, and how her cheeks flushed and paled as she turned over the snapshots. ("For what's a fellow like that to make such a fuss about?" thought Elsie, who had never liked John since he had snubbed her advances as a child.)

"And you'll have my dress ready by Thursday?"

Lilian Castle answered that she would do her level best.

"I must have it," said Elsie, "there's no best or worst about it."

And Lilian Castle remembering those half-crowns in the collection plate, and that Mr. Hunt would be mayor of Whitfield next year, so every one said, and that a poor widow couldn't afford to quarrel with her bread and butter, pressed her lips together and said, "Very well."

But before Thursday Elsie came in tears and showed Lilian Castle a telegram. "He's reported missing," she wept, "and

that means he's dead, I know it does, it always does. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do? Now Lucia and Janos have no father! You better make me a black dress—no, a grey one. I'll sing at the concert, it's my duty, but I can't wear pink."

Lilian Castle's knees began to tremble. She caught at the table, sank into a chair, whispered "Oh, Luke!" Then she pulled herself together, and asked Elsie what material she was thinking of for the grey dress. Mrs. Castle was terribly upset, of course, "But it might have been John," she said to herself, "it might have been John."

## I I

ELSIE in grey, and a little paler than usual, due to a discreet use of her powder puff, was a ravishing spectacle. She made as much capital as she could out of her bereavement, and was not averse to being discreetly comforted by any one who wore an officer's uniform. She had never loved Luke so much as now that she had lost him, for she had lost him, nothing would persuade her otherwise. She went to visit Marta, took Lucia on her knee, wept over her and said, "Your daddy is killed."

And Lucia answered, "Go away, my daddy sent me a kiss in Gran'an's letter, and Gran'an gave it me."

"My daddy sent me a kiss," breathed Janos, who generally echoed what Lucia said.

Marta exclaimed, "What you telling them kids lies for? Luke ain't dead, if he was I should feel it in me bones. The Bosches have got him and he'll be safe now till war's ended. You can't get rid of Luke that quick."

"I think you are an unkind old woman," cried Elsie, with a little burst of tears. "As if I *wanted* to get rid of Luke!"

"He'd be better without her," thought Marta, when Elsie had gone. "She ain't no good to him. Now Lucia, out in the yard while I learn you the flip-flaps. You've got to do 'em proper by you're Dad comes back."

When Elsie got home, Minnie Hunt said, "What next? Lilian Castle's gone frigging off to Scarborough and left me without my satin slip finished!"

"Why off to Scarborough?"

"Oh, that John of hers. There's a lad in hospital there wrote he had news of him. Did you ever? The woman's soft in the head over John. She'd fly up to the moon, I do believe, if it sent word it had shone on his face."

"Stick-in-the-mud John," said Elsie. "Good job his mother cares for him. It isn't likely anybody else will."

"She might as well have finished my slip before she went,"

said Minnie Hunt. "It wouldn't have taken her but a few hours."

Lilian Castle saw the lad in hospital at Scarborough. When she found that he had actually served under her John, she went out to buy him a bunch of purple grapes and a tin of tobacco. But she never purchased either of these delicacies, because, just as she was entering the fruit shop there was a shattering explosion. An adventurous German cruiser, not visible from shore, was plumping a few shells into Scarborough. When Lilian Castle came completely to herself again, she was in the train going home, with no memory of how she had got there.

Next day, Minnie Hunt, calling to spur her on over the matter of the silk slip, found Lilian Castle in the back room lying on the floor in a faint, with pins, needles and cotton reels scattered round her.

"Why, Lilian!" said Mrs. Hunt. "Lilian Castle!"

Since there was no response, she tried water and the loosening of Lilian Castle's clothes.

These remedies also proving unavailing, she hammered on the wall and screamed for the next-door neighbour, who sent her little boy for a doctor.

That evening Lilian Castle lay in the spare bedroom in the Hunts' handsome villa, and Minnie Hunt sat by her side. Lilian Castle thought Minnie Hunt was old Marta and said such things to her as gave Mrs. Hunt, so she afterwards declared to Alfred, "a stitch in the side from sheer fright."

"Leave my house, you whore," said Lilian Castle. Yes, she actually used that unlady-like word, "which you'd never have credited she knew the meaning of," thought Mrs. Hunt, as she tiptoed out to call Alfred.

When Alfred came in, Lilian Castle said, "I bought some grapes for you," and Alfred, though quite taken aback, kept himself magnificently in hand, and said, "Thank'ee, my dear."

Suddenly Lilian Castle's face became transfigured. "Why, it's John!" she said.

"So it is," answered Alfred promptly, though, as he told Minnie later, he could feel what hair he had left rising on his scalp, for he did not know, no, he'd be blowed if he did, whether

Lilian Castle mistook him, Alfred, for John, or whether she was looking behind him at a ghost.

"Give me your hand," whispered Lilian Castle, and there she lay with Alfred's podgy hand in hers, "mumbling," as he put it, till the sweat "fair poured off his forehead."

So for about half an hour, when, thinking she had fallen asleep, Alfred ventured to withdraw his hand. He was creeping away on squeaky shoes to fetch Minnie, when Lilian Castle opened her eyes again. "It isn't John, at all!" she cried wildly. "It's all been a mistake!"

And those were the last words she uttered.

"Poor soul," sobbed Minnie Hunt, after the funeral. "And she never knew as she was lying in the best bedroom, covered with the silk quilt she'd admired so often. I wish I could have told her that, Alfred, it would have been such a comfort to her. I shall have to finish that slip myself, now, but I'd rather have given it to her, I would that, than that this should have happened. And who's going to write and tell John?"

"I will," said Alfred manfully. "I don't like the job, mind you, but—" Alfred squared his shoulders. The future mayor of Whitfield must not allow himself to be daunted by a little thing like that.

Elsie changed from grey to black. "It's only respectful, "seeing she was Luke's mother," she said. "Black suits me too," she thought, as she regarded herself in the mirror. "Makes me look slim and shows my hair off. And I can wear white for evening concerts."

So Elsie, in trim black, or shining white, sang for soldiers, and stitched for soldiers, and danced with soldiers, and flirted with soldiers, and dreamed of soldiers. And, one morning, as she was tripping through Market Square on her way to a committee meeting of The Soldiers' Comforts Society, whom should she meet but Bertie Wainwright?

"Hallo, *hallo!*" said Bertie. "If it isn't my little sweetheart!"

Elsie tossed her head. "You never told me you were married," she said.

"Married? Who said I was married?"

"Well you are, aren't you?"

"Not that I know of," answered Bertie.

"But—but your wife used to ring you up at the office—I know she did—I was told so."

"Oh, come, come," protested Bertie playfully. "Not my wife—a little lady friend."

He was exceedingly well dressed, and he looked exceedingly prosperous, which was perhaps why Elsie had condescended to stop and speak to him. "Anyway, you never wrote," she said angrily.

"No," said Bertie. "I didn't. You see I had pneumonia."

A lie, but Elsie was charming enough to warrant it. Bertie never hurt a charming lady's feelings, if he could avoid it. "Must have been sitting on those pebbles at Cleethorpes," he went on. "Damned uncomfortable pebbles they were, too. But not for you, because, if I remember, you sat on my knees. You remember, honey?"

"I'm not your honey," said Elsie. "You served me a dirty trick." And she tilted up her nose and pranced past him.

But when she went home to lunch, there was Bertie sitting in the drawing-room.

"I've come to make my peace, honey," he said.

"I'm married," Elsie told him. "At least I was but—" her voice quavered pathetically. "He's—he's dead." And before she knew how it happened, she was sitting on Bertie's knee again, and crying with her head against his cigar-scented waistcoat.

Bertie stayed to lunch, Bertie stayed to tea. He took Elsie in a taxi to the concert where she was singing that evening. He told her she had an angel's voice, and he brought her home in another taxi. He kissed her good-night and said he would call again to-morrow.

"Such a *nice* man," said Minnie Hunt. "I never could make out why you turned him down."

"He's old enough to be my father," said Elsie petulantly.

"A man did ought to be older than his wife," said Minnie Hunt. "Look at me and father, how comfortable we've got on. Not that I'd say a word against Luke, poor fellow. Only you know, Elsie, in your father's altered circumstances, a circus, well——"

It didn't seem quite decent to finish the sentence, so Minnie Hunt didn't finish it. But she couldn't help feeling that it would be just as well if Luke were "missing" for good and all. "It's plain to see that Mr. Wainwright adores you," she said.

But perhaps what Bertie really adored was the shipping shares, and the notion that he might "touch the old man" for a sum of money.

Bertie Wainwright had started a business of his own for the manufacture of artificial silk goods. Bertie was doing well, but he could do better, granted the necessary capital. "I ought to have married you long ago, sweetheart," said Bertie to Elsie, "if it hadn't been for that unfortunate pneumonia. And then you went and tied yourself up! Who'd have believed you could be so heartless?"

"I had to," said Elsie, and she told him about Lucia. Yes, Bertie's eyes were brown, so that was that.

"Whe-ew! So I'm a proud pappa," exclaimed Bertie. "We-ell I never!"

Elsie went to Marta's yard, gave Lucia a good scrub (she was standing on her head in the rain when Elsie found her) dressed her up and took her home to show to Bertie. The meeting was not a successful one, for Lucia didn't like Bertie. All the same he said she was a "ducky" and handed her a shilling. And Lucia said, "I don't want it," and Elsie said, "She's been badly brought up—it's not my fault."

Bertie went away, but he gave Elsie his address this time, and he sent her a ring to wear "in memory of other days." Just after the armistice he came again. "I want to put a proposition to you, honey," he said. "If you were free, would you marry me?"

"I don't know that I am free," answered Elsie, all in a twitter.

"But if you were?"

"Oh Bertie!" Elsie turned to him with the prettiest, most pathetic, most pleading of expressions. And there they were in each other's arms.

"I ought to be quite, quite certain," murmured Elsie.

"But a bit of canoodling," said Bertie, "won't hurt us one way or the other."



No, Elsie supposed it wouldn't.

And since Bertie was not a man to stop at a bit of canoodling, they were lovers again before the day was out.

Elsie said to Mrs. Hunt. "It wouldn't be wrong for me to marry Bertie, if——?"

And Mrs. Hunt said, why, no, of course it wouldn't, and she went in great excitement to Alfred, and asked him what he would think of Mr. Wainwright as a son-in-law.

Alfred thought favourably of Mr. Wainwright. "He's genteel and all that," he said, "and in a fair way of business. Still, right is right, she'll have to wait."

But, at the same time, Mr. Wainwright was received at the Hunts' villa quite as one of the family, and tacitly regarded by both Alfred and Minnie as their daughter's betrothed.

And Elsie began to dream of the house she would have in Bradford, and the way she would furnish it, and the dress she would wear at the wedding, and the kind of wedding it would be, (so correct, with photographs in the paper, not a mix-up like that last queer affair that was neither one thing nor the other) and of the car Bertie promised her, and of the trips to London they would make in it, and of how she would send the children to boarding school as soon as possible (Lucia could go immediately, and she was the worst) and of how she would have breakfast in bed every day, and never get up before eleven.

And then, one evening soon after Christmas, when Whitfield had been for three days wrapped in a yellow fog, which was very trying to the nerves and temper, who should walk in but Luke, shattering Elsie's dreams, and bringing her back with a bump to stark realities.

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### III

It was a difficult meeting for Elsie, but she played up heroically; she cried in Luke's arms and told him that she'd thought he was dead, she'd thought he was dead. And Luke, as he held her warmly, could not know that she was crying partly from disappointment. Mr. and Mrs. Hunt greeted him effusively—over effusively—to gloss the feeling in their hearts that it would have been better had he not returned.

Mrs. Hunt, doing her best to be motherly and tactful, told him about Lilian Castle's death. Luke said, "That'll be bad for John." Then, after a pause, "I could wish that she and I had got on better." That was all. He was not pretending any emotion he did not feel. Minnie Hunt was rather shocked. "I've arranged for a nice little tombstone," she said. "Nothing elaborate, but plain and tasty. Alfred's paying for it."

Luke said that was "more than kind." Then he suggested that he and Elsie should be getting along now.

"Where to?" asked Elsie.

"To the Bell Yard," answered Luke. "To see the kids and Gran'an."

"Isn't it *rather* foggy?" said Elsie.

But, fog or no fog, Luke would go, and go at once. So, reluctantly, Elsie got on her hat and coat.

On the way, Luke said, "It's been one durned long nightmare, Elsie, but it's over."

Elsie squeezed his arm. "How thin you've grown, poor Luke!"

And he answered happily, "Aye, the Bosches didn't feed us too well. But I'd been hungry afore and I managed better'n some."

"You *were* taken prisoner, then?"

"At Cambrai. But we won't talk about it now, Else, for I want to forget it."

Marta gave a scream of joy when she saw him. "But I knew it, lad," she declared, "I allus said as you'd come back."

Hugging and kissing one another, they laughed like two children.

Lucia and Janos were asleep, a fair head and a dark head cuddled close together, Lucia with an arm under Janos' neck, Janos with an arm flung over Lucia's chest.

"No, we won't wake 'em," said Luke.

He bent over them and his thoughts were tender. These were the little artistes of the future, whose minds were not to be shocked by the horrors that had overwhelmed his generation, whose lives were not to be broken in two, as his had been. Perhaps—he couldn't figure it out very clearly, but the padres and such folk, who ought to know, repeatedly said so—perhaps it was to preserve these lives from evil that he had been fighting. Yes, perhaps that was it. At any rate, Janos should never see the sights that he had seen, nor Lucia go through what Elsie had gone through—for now the nightmare was over.

"And Dolly?" he asked.

"Oh," said Elsie off-handedly, "I sold her."

"You—sold her?" It was the first intimation Luke had received that all was not well in the world to which he had returned. "Who—who to?" he asked in bewilderment.

"I forget," said Elsie. "A greengrocer, I think it was."

"But—Else—why?" His voice was almost a whisper.

"Well," cried Elsie in a sudden petulance of self-justification, "what was I to do? You couldn't expect me to go on paying and paying for Dolly. Besides, I couldn't get any food for her, come winter."

There it was again—the cloud on his face, the pout of his lips. The same Luke, not changed in any way. And there would be the same life, the same hateful, rough, unsettled, grinding life, beginning all over again. No, she wouldn't, she couldn't bear it!

"And Promise I had shot," she went on defiantly. "He wasn't any good. You can't have stallions pulling carts——"

"Promise I had shot." Just like that, as heartlessly as if she were telling him she'd had a blind unwanted kitten drowned! "Promise I had shot." Promise who would dance, walk on his hind legs, jump through hoops, walk the ring fence, pirou-wit, everything. Promise who was so tiny and so pretty and so affec-

tionate, Promise who would come to your whistle, and follow you about the streets like a dog—" Promise I had shot."

Luke sat down and leaned his head on his hand. " I can't think—what made you—do it, Else," he said. Then he reflected what these years must have been to her, how worried, how anxious, how lonely she must have been. Yes, nigh out of her mind, odd times, with fretting, no doubt. Yes, he must make allowances, yes, he must not feel sore. She couldn't have known how often he had thought of those two ponies, out there in the trenches, out there when he heard a horse scream in its death agony: " The ponies is safe, at any rate," he'd thought, " they're too small to be taken." It had made him feel that something was left in a demented world to think of those ponies. And, all the time, " Promise I had shot," and, " I sold Dolly—I forget who to." But don't think of it, she didn't understand, she didn't feel the same way as he did about horses.

" Shall we go to bed now?" he said, standing up. " You didn't sell the wagon, I suppose?"

" Heavens no, who'd buy it?" exclaimed Elsie. " But we're not going to sleep in that old thing. We can have the spare room, up home."

" As you wish," said Luke.

Marta watched him, her shrewd old eyes bright with pity. " Eh, lad," she thought, " you pictured a different home-coming, I fancy. You're finding her out, lad, at last; and since find her out you must, the sooner the better. . . . Eh, I could wring her neck for her!" said Marta to herself, in sudden fury.

All the way home Luke talked of the circus he must begin to build up as soon as may be. Of how they would have to start again from nothing, of what a struggle it was going to be, of how they would have to begin with a booth at a fair, just himself doing a low-wire act and a few acrobatics, and Elsie taking the money. " You might dance a bit, too, Else," he said, " and then there's Blanche when I get her out of quarantine. I worried, when I was took prisoner, about her. But it was all right, the padre looked after her, he brought her home and paid for her letties. I see him when I come through London and he says ' Well, she's yours again now.' One of the best, he is. And she's cute, is Blanche."

Oh yes, they'd manage. There was Lucia, she could do a trick or two, couldn't she? And Janos would be coming along soon, and, maybe, when they'd saved a bit, they could buy Dolly back, he would make inquiries to-morrow, and find out where she was. If she was in the town he'd trace her, all right.

So he talked. But Elsie—what was the matter with her? He couldn't make her out, she seemed numb and oddlike. Perhaps she was ashamed about the ponies, thinking he was blaming her? No, he wasn't blaming her; he talked eagerly, confidently, to try to make her understand that she needn't give one look back, that what was done was done, that he was only thinking—and how hopefully!—about the future.

But, when they got into bed, she turned away from him and said, "I've got some awful headache, Luke." And he answered tenderly, "We'll sleep then, Else." But they didn't sleep. Luke, despite his fine resolutions neither to look back nor to feel sore about anything, kept thinking of Dolly and Promise. He would doze, wake with a start, wonder what was wrong, and recall those horrible defiant words, "Promise I had shot."

What had come over Elsie?

And Elsie, breathing regularly in pretence of sleep, was thinking to herself, "I won't. I can't. Now it's all spoilt. What am I to do? Shall I tell him? Well, why not?" But despite her self-assurances that everybody had been changed by the war, and that people were now without humbug, and that therefore she had a right to do what she liked, Elsie realized that Luke had not changed, and that he expected her to be the same Elsie, and that together they would take up the threads of life where they had dropped them.

Next morning he went with her to look at their wagon, which Marta had kept aired and cleaned. Janos was in Luke's arms and Lucia clinging to his hand; he was their Dad, who had sent them kisses in Gran'an's letters, and Lucia remembered him—mostly by his smell, it seemed, for she kept flattening her little nose against his leg and sniffing with appreciation.

Elsie remarked tentatively, "They say the circus profession's done for, don't they, Luke?"

"They can say what they damn' well please, eh Janos?"

"What they damn' well please," echoed Janos, grasping

Luke's cheek in his fist. The cheek was pleasantly hard and scratchy to feel, unlike Gran'an's, which was soft and wrinkly. Absorbed in a new sensation, Janos pinched and pinched.

"But," said Elsie, "we can't live on air. My dad was saying he'd set you up in a new business."

"Very kind of him, but nothin' doin'."

Elsie frowned. "I can't, I won't," she thought. Her thought flashed into speech. "It's all very fine for you, but I *loathe* being poor."

"You won't be poor longer'n I can help it," answered Luke. He would see about getting work, at once, any work at all that would earn him money—if it were but a bit of conjuring. And as soon as the weather was fine they would put old Sandow in the shafts ("for I suppose Millar Barnes hasn't sold him?" he said with a touch of bitterness) and they would be off, the four of them, to try their luck at the fairs. "And Lucia here shall work for her Dad," he added, giving a tweak to Lucia's flaxen hair.

"I can work good," Lucia assured him. And she ceased her busy sniffing of Luke's leg (which brought back a host of wonderful memories of the atmosphere into which she had been born) to show him how she could do the splits. "See Dad!"

"Brahve Lucia!" said her proud father. And "Brahve!" crowed Janos, pinching Luke's cheek.

He was hopeless, Elsie thought. He would never understand.

Luke got a job, the only one that offered, as a groom in some riding stables in Norfolk. Bertie Wainwright came to Elsie.

"Honey," he said, "this is most unfortunate."

"I *won't* give you up!" cried Elsie hysterically, and, after he had gone she sat down to write a letter to Luke.

Dear Luke,

I think I'd better speak plainly now than later. You have been away a long time and things have changed. I can't go back to the old life. So if you won't do as I suggested about the business, we must separate. I'm sorry I have to write like this, but there's two of us to be considered. Not only you.

Elsie.

Luke threw up his job and came back by the first train. Elsie

was out, he rushed about looking for her, and, not being able to find her, dashed to the Old Bell Yard.

Marta was coming round from the back of the wagon with a dipper full of corn for the chickens. When she saw the expression on Luke's face, she exclaimed, "Lord save us!" She gave the corn to Lucia and Janos to scatter, drew Luke into the wagon, and bolted the door.

"See what's came to us now!" cried Luke, and he thrust Elsie's letter into her hand.

Marta muttered her way through Elsie's large and spiky writing. When she had done, she narrowed her bright eyes at Luke. "I allus thinks, though I said nowt, as she waren't the wife for you, lad. Best do as she says and let her go her ways. It's bitter, but it's best. Now, now, keep your nose in the air! There's wuss has come to men as good. There's some has wives of gold and God takes 'em, and that's a wuss mishap than this 'ere."

"But Elsie——" cried Luke incoherently. "I thought—Elsie——"

"You thought wrong then, lad," said Marta.

"Oh God!" Luke laid his head on the table. "What does it mean, Gran'an? What *does* it mean?"

"It means," said Marta fiercely, "as she's a baggage as thinks you ain't good enough for her. It means her fancy's gone elsewhere——"

"No!" cried Luke.

"Aye," said Marta, "like it or not, lad, it means that."

Luke stumbled to his feet. "I best—go and ask her," he muttered.

## IV

"WELL, if you *must* know," cried Elsie at last, after she had protested, and denied, and hedged, and doubled, and refused to give a straight answer to Luke's straight questions, and said it was merely this and merely that, and why must Luke be so selfish, and why couldn't he understand, "Well if you *must* know," she almost screamed at him, after step by step he had followed her verbal doublings into a corner whence it seemed she had no escape, "Well, if you *must* know, I *do* love someone else, then!"

"In that case," said Luke dazedly, "there's no more to be said."

But there was a lot more to be said. Elsie wanted a divorce. He couldn't expect her to remain a grass-widow all her life! Oh, he was selfish, he was selfish, she kept on reiterating, he couldn't see anybody's point of view but his own.

"Don't, Elsie," murmured Luke, "don't speak so bitter!"

"It's time I did speak," sobbed Elsie angrily. "I've been a drudge and a slave and a back number ever since I married you. And you've thought about nothing but circus, *circus*, *circus*! I hate you and your circus, I always did, I never would have married you if it hadn't been Lucia——" She put her hand over her mouth and gave him a scared look. She hadn't meant to say that.

"If—it hadn't been Lucia," repeated Luke in bewilderment.

"Well," babbled Elsie incoherently, "I couldn't tell, I didn't know—it might not have been—— Don't look at me like that, Luke! I expect she was yours—— Don't! *Don't!* Let me go!"

Elsie stood with her back against the wall. Luke held her by the arm, his fingers were like steel bands, bruising her soft flesh. "You're—you're too strong, Luke," she whimpered, "you're—you're hurting me!"

"If it hadn't been Lucia? What do you mean—if it hadn't been for Lucia?"



"You know what I mean," wailed Elsie. "Let me go!" She writhed and twisted, but still he held her. "All right, I'll tell you plainly then—only *stop hurting me!*—She isn't yours. No, no, I didn't mean that, she is yours, I know she is! It was only that—I couldn't help it—at Cleethorpes—he—he took me by surprise and I thought—in case—— Luke! Luke!" Elsie whimpered with terror. "Dear Luke, forgive me—Oh—Luke——! Oh—Luke——!"

Impulses that Luke wouldn't have believed he possessed were surging over his mind, blinding his vision, suffocating his heart. One hand went up to Elsie's white throat, then the other, he would strangle the deceitful life out of her now, and kill himself, and there would be an end of all. His fingers tightened round that white throat, kill, kill! Then into his distracted mind flashed a vision of Lucia, her little face gravely smiling up at him for approval as her little feet slid apart, toes, heels, toes, heels—"I can work good. See, Dad!"

"Oh God—forgive me!" gasped Luke, dropping his hands.

Elsie sank in a limp heap to the floor. Luke rushed from the Hunts' house.

By and by Elsie got up, looked at her pale face in the mirror, tidied her hair. "That's settled it," she thought. "I'm glad I had the courage to tell. Some wouldn't have. Brute! I'll never see him again. I'll lock myself in. He's dangerous." See, there were the red marks of his fingers on her neck—and her head was splitting! "And *that's* the kind of man," she said to her reflection in the mirror, "that expects you to share your life with him!" . . .

"—And so, Gran'an," said Luke to Marta that night in the wagon where Lucia and Janos lay sleeping, "I fought it out, like. What difference does it make who begot her? She's the same kid, ain't she? She needn't never know. That's right, ain't it, Gran'an?"

"Aye, that's right, lad," answered Marta, "you and me'll look arter her."

"Only," said Luke slowly, "what if she—" his lips trembled, "what if Elsie were to claim her?"

Marta chuckled. "Elsie won't," she said, "if you do as I tell you."

So, after a little more talk, Luke went into his own wagon, and wrote a letter.

Dear Else,

I'm sorry I behaved bad to-day. I was took aback. I agree to a divorce, and will do the necessary and send you particulars.

But I want you to sign a paper letting me have Lucia and Janos. Also you must give me back my fourpenny bit. If you don't agree I'm sorry but I can do nothing. So then we stay as we are.

Luke.

He kept the letter by him till the morning, to be quite certain that he had said all that should be said. He lay in his bunk and thought about it. He had fought and conquered his first unreasoning anger as, with clenched hands, he walked by the Endcliffe river, earlier in the day. Elsie's faithlessness was something that had to be accepted, one of the "downs" that Marta had said alternated with the "ups" all through life to the very end. But was it all that he had to say to Elsie? It seemed such a cold and abrupt end to his relationship with her—the woman with whom he had thought to share his every joy and sorrow. Why had it come about, oh why? Surely it need not have happened? Had he indeed always been selfish, as she said, not considered her, but only his own aims and hopes, expecting them to be her aims and hopes also? With his arms clasped behind his head, Luke tried to figure it out. "I hate you and your circus," that's what she had said, but if she only understood she could not feel like that.

Something wrong with him, then, that he had not made her understand? That made people who did not understand (his mother as well as Elsie) hate him and his circus? Yes, he believed he saw it now. It was like this.

When you want an animal—a horse or a lion—to work with you and for you—what do you do? Impose your will on them? Yes, if you like to call it that, but first you do something else. First you see life with their eyes; in sympathy, in imagination, you become that horse, or that lion. You know how they feel, what they think; you understand, because you are one with

them, what you can expect them to do, and what they cannot do. Then they in their turn become one with you, and, when you work together, it is not so much a question of imposing your will as a question of there being but one will between the two of you. But, with human beings? Now, for the first time, Luke realized that with human beings he had never tried to work like that (except perhaps long ago with Scory), he had never tried to see through alien eyes, he had expected them to see through his. Yes, that was how failure had come about, both with his mother and with Elsie; it had never occurred to him that they had a point of view, and this was what had come of his stupidity! Too late now. The time for seeing life through those alien eyes had gone, the act was over . . . But he would like Elsie to understand that he felt himself to blame.

In the morning he unfolded his letter and took up his pen to try and write a postscript. But what should it be? "Elsie I am not blaming you"? Or, "Elsie, it has been as much my fault as yours"? No, it didn't sound right. It was like God Almighty being condescending. "Don't know as I can say anything," thought Luke, staring at the letter. "Best leave it at that." But—the woman who had lain in his arms so many nights in this very wagon? Was there nothing he could say to her? A sudden tenderness towards the days that were gone flooded over him. He dipped his pen in the ink-pot and wrote hurriedly, "I hope you will be very happy." Then he sealed up the letter and carried it to post.

"Now I have nothing," he thought, as he went back into Marta's yard. "I start again from the beginning."

In the yard Marta was sitting on her wagon steps, instructing Lucia and Janos, whilst she peeled potatoes for their dinner. Lucia was walking on her hands, Janos was trying to turn a catherine-wheel. "See Dad, see Dad!" cried Lucia, looking at him upside down from between her moving arms.

"See, Dad!" echoed Janos, falling flat.

Luke smiled. No, not from the very beginning. He had Lucia and Janos.

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## V

THAT spring, Marta, Luke, Lucia and Janos set out on their travels, and the fourpenny bit rested once more at the bottom of Luke's pocket. Elsie had posted it to him, and she had signed the agreement giving him Lucia and Janos, and he had spent a night with a woman and sent Elsie the particulars. So there they were, Marta, Lucia, Janos and Luke, with the road ahead of them and nothing to look back for.

Since they had but one horse, the stately-stepping Sandow, Luke had sold his wagon, and they all slept together in Marta's. He had sold the seating and properties of Ashbourne's Circus, also, and though they did not fetch much, for money was tight and hard to come by, he realized enough to buy back Dolly, whom he found, after days of inquiry and search, drawing a little ice-cream cart through the slums of Whitfield. The big-top he cut up and reconstructed into a tent easily erected and suitable for taking its place among other side-shows on a fair-ground, and light enough to be carried on the back of the wagon, with Dolly harnessed ahead of Sandow to help when they came to a hill. The money realized from the sale of his wagon was all Luke possessed in the world, but, with the addition of Marta's annuity, it would tide them over profitless days. And as to the future—the future must look after itself; sufficient for the moment the fact that they were on the road, that spring had come, and genial weather, that in a showman's life if there were downs there were also ups, that the road stretched on and on ahead of them, and that their luck might be waiting round any corner.

Their properties consisted of Luke's low-wire, Dolly's little gates, and a see-saw on which she performed with Lucia and Janos, two pairs of stilts (a big pair and a little pair), and a few wooden bottles and balls and a red-and-blue barrel with which Luke juggled. Their costumes—Luke's blue-and-rose Spanish dress, now sadly faded, and patched in many places, and a long pair of striped trousers to cover the big stilts, for Luke, and a smaller pair to cover the little stilts, for Lucia. For the rest,

Lucia did her simple tumbling tricks in a short white frock and knickers; and Janos, when he appeared on the show front, had to be content with a red handkerchief tied round his head.

The performance, which was rapid and spirited, lasted only half an hour. First Luke juggled with his bottles and balls, then he put Dolly through her tricks. Then, whilst he rigged up his low-wire, Lucia amused the onlookers to the best of her ability by turning catherine-wheels and walking on her hands, and doing some simple contortions. Then came Luke's wire-walking, then his foot juggling with the coloured barrel. And as a finale, Luke's little act with Lucia, in which, lying on his back, he balanced a small ladder on one foot, whilst she, rung by rung, carefully climbed to the top, and, having reached it, shouted a shrill hurrah, and stretched wide her arms, as if to embrace the whole world.

The prices of admission were threepence for grown-ups and a penny for children. Marta took the money, and put the audience in an anticipatory good-humour by her voluble and amusing back-chat. The stilt exhibition was given outside the tent, Lucia on her little stilts following Luke up and down to induce onlookers to step inside. And for this purpose, also, Janos came in useful, sitting perched on Dolly's back, with the red handkerchief tied jauntily round his dark curly hair.

Janos was shy at first. Unlike Lucia, he had no memories taking him back to a show world of sawdust and glitter and watching faces. Janos did not like being stared at; perched on Dolly he would put up his hands to his face and peep at the amused crowd through his spread fingers. But, after a few months travelling his shyness vanished, he came to know the flatties for what they were, people who paid pennies to see him and Lucia and their Dad do clever things, and he would raise himself to his feet on Dolly, stick out his chest, strike a manly attitude, and beam seraphically, as much as to say, "You can't do this!"

Sometimes they joined a fair, sometimes they pitched their tent on a village green, gave their little show and moved on to the next village, sometimes, if things were going badly with them, Luke would take his stand in the corner of the market-place in a

small town, and give an exhibition of juggling in the open, and Lucia or Janos would carry round the hat.

Marta cooked for them, washed for them, mended for them, mothered them, rejoiced with them when luck was in, and laughed when luck was out. At times, it seemed to Luke that she was ageless, that she had been the same ever since he could remember her, and that it was impossible that she should ever grow old or die. At other times he would recollect, with an emotion that was part admiration, part pity, that she was an old, old woman, that she had lived in the world nigh on eighty years, and he would try to make her sit down, rest, stop what she was doing, take her ease.

But, Lord save us! Marta wouldn't hear of it. Was Luke trying to push her into her grave by making her feel she was no longer fit for aught? "We go on in harness till we drop, lad," she told him; "but if you lift the harness off we drop at once. So get out of my way and mind your own business, and leave Marta Castelli to mind hers."

They didn't return to Whitfield for the winter. What need? Here they were, the four of them together, with the whole world for home, and Whitfield a dreary hole where the sun shone less often, and the fog hung longer, than in many another place. Through the summer they had travelled steadily southward, and for the winter they pitched in Sussex, on a piece of common, sheltered by encircling woods. Gipsies, little better, they lived as they could. Luke leased a bit of woodland, felled trees and sawed them into logs, which, with Sandow and a home-made cart, he went from house to house, through the countryside and in the neighbouring towns, selling. Marta sold her eggs, when she had any to spare, and Lucia and Janos ran wild. Sometimes Luke would get an engagement to do his juggling and a few elementary conjuring tricks at a village concert, with Lucia as assistant. For one of these tricks, he constructed a magic box in which he would shut up Lucia, stick swords through the box at every conceivable angle, pull them out again, open the box and reveal Lucia smiling and whole in every limb. But this was not "circus" it was chicanery, Luke did not enjoy it. Moreover he had only his old Spanish costume to wear on these occasions, and he felt chagrined at his shabby appearance.

Meanwhile he was training both Lucia and Janos to ride on Dolly. He rigged up a mechanic for them, and, sleet or snow, east wind or north wind, mud or drizzle, as long as the ground was not frozen or the rain coming down in torrents, they went through their practice every morning. Then, still buckled into the mechanic, Lucia was lifted on to the low-wire, and proud she was when she could run from one end of it to the other without slipping. Out of stout wire, padded with rags, Luke made a pair of rings, and from young larch trees constructed a frame to support them, and on these rings Janos would hang by his chubby little hands, and Luke would take him by the feet and turn him heels over head—and it wasn't long, either, before Janos was doing circles backwards and forwards on his own account, and inverted hangs, and nest hangs, and half-nest hangs.

At the beginning of the winter, Luke had fetched his little white bitch, Blanche, out of quarantine. The joy at this unexpected reunion was, on Blanche's part, so intense that it expressed itself in utterances of grief and physical distress. Blanche's tongue hung out so far that Lucia thought she would never be able to put it back again, and Janos said, "Blanche's tongue is too long, my Dad will have to cut it." But, by next morning, the tongue was in its proper place, and that was a great relief to both the children.

To the formation of Blanche, half a dozen breeds, at least, had contributed their diverse canine ideals of what a dog should be. But Blanche, whom nature had endowed with a very definite personality, had managed to amalgamate these various ideals into an attractive and dainty new breed that was her very own creation. Dandie Dinmont? You would hazard. Certainly not; look at that waving plume of a tail! Chow then? Good heavens, no! Did you ever see a chow with drooped and silky ears? Dwarf collie, perhaps? My good fellow, are you blind—with that broad muzzle? But *some* breed surely, such a shapely, compact little body! Yes, her own breed: Blanche, just Blanche, with the brains of half a dozen aristocratic lineages shut up inside that white domed head of hers.

So now, through the winter months, there was Blanche to remind of her old tricks and to coax through new ones (not that she needed much coaxing—she was all alive, was Blanche) and

also, in due season, Blanche to find a mate for. Luke visited a gipsy encampment and paid half a crown for a brown and white, shaggy-coated mongrel dog. He was nothing but skin and bone under his matted coat, but his eyes were friendly and intelligent. "By and by we shall have a troupe," said Luke to Marta. Not a troupe of "prize buffers" to be sure, like Judy and Draggles and their sons and daughters, but a troupe that would be none the less attractive and alert and workable—trust Blanche for that! Judy and Draggles and family—Luke wondered what had become of them. He had heard nothing of Frieda and Herman.

Round about Christmas time Luke had a stroke of luck. A pony was wanted for a Christmas pantomime at Eastbourne, to appear with a retinue of heralds and pages on the island of the Marquis of Caribou. (The pantomime was *Puss in Boots*.) Luke wrote offering the services of Dolly, and received an answer to say that the manager would drive over to inspect her. And when the manager's car arrived—who should step out of it but the lizard-eyed Mr. Hessop?

"Good God," exclaimed Mr. Hessop, "it's Luke Castle!"

When he spoke Mr. Hessop wheezed like a pug-dog. He was in a complaining mood. He had left Whitfield, because of his chest, and was "trying out" Eastbourne, but Eastbourne didn't come up to expectations. Also, a month ago, he had engaged Scory Appleyard to play *Puss-in-Boots* for him, and in the interim Scory had got himself jugged for running a gambling saloon.

"We're all at sixes and sevens," said Mr. Hessop. "At least we were this morning. But you can help us out, I expect. And what about that pretty little kid with the mop of hair, can she ride?"

*Could* she ride! Lucia was almost insulted.

So that Christmas, Luke, with a cat's mask on his head, and a tight coat of catskin drawn over his perspiring body, somersaulted and pricked balloons and chased mice and went through all the tumbling and acrobatic tricks expected of a pantomime Puss. And though perhaps he was not such a comic cat as Scory would have been, he made up for it by amazing leaps and capers, soubrettes, back-flips and spring somersaults. And he remembered with some amusement, how once, long ago, he had said, "I'll be cat in pantomime," and it seemed to him that whatever you



prophesied for yourself, somehow, sooner or later, must come to pass; and if that was so, why then, the future yet held securely the glories of Castelli's Circus.

Lucia, in a glittering white satin jockey outfit, appeared riding on Dolly, and when Mr. Hessop realized the potentialities of the pair of them, he had the stage cleared for Lucia to put Dolly through some of her tricks. Like a toy circus act it was, with other little jockeys less agile than Lucia holding the hoops for Dolly to jump through, and Lucia moving as gracefully as a ballet dancer in the centre of the stage, and from time to time cracking a miniature white-and-silver ring-master's whip.

Mr. Hessop was so pleased that when the pantomime closed he presented Lucia with her jockey suit and Dolly with her white and silver-studded harness, and there were two valuable additions to the Ashbourne Show wardrobe. For old times' sake, moreover, he had been generous in the matter of salaries. Luke came back to Marta and Janos with several pounds in his pocket. "I feel like making a cocoa tin money-box again," he said.

"Or there's Lucio's stocking," said Marta thoughtfully. "There's luck in the toe of that old article, I do believe."

So Luke put his savings into the stocking, and remembered, rather sadly, the shower of gold and silver coins Marta had once shaken out of it, and how he had declared he would repay her a hundred-fold. Well, the war had mucked up all that for him—and more than that—and perhaps now Marta's life would be at an end before he had a chance to repay her. Repay her? He could never repay her, year by year his debt to her increased. It was not only the money, that was the least part of it, it was herself she had given him. Luke realized that Castelli's Circus, when it came to pass, as come it must and should, would be as much Marta's creation as his own.

The spring of 1920 saw Ashbourne's taking the road with a more ambitious programme. A real little circus again now, if still a midget one. There was Blanche and her husband, Mr. Brown, a clever performer, if not so attractive looking as his spouse. There was Dolly and there was Sandow, who, stiff-jointed though he might be, didn't look too bad when dressed up in the red trappings Luke had purchased with some of the new hoard out of the stocking. Luke did some spirited riding on Sandow,

spirited that is to say on his part, and Lucia, who was now in her ninth year, appeared in all the splendour of her satin jockey suit on Dolly. Luke also bought and trained a goose and a pig, and dressed Janos up in a clown's hat and a huge paper collar, to appear with them in the ring.

"We're multiplying Gran'an," he said to Marta, "we're ten of us now, not reckoning the pups." Blanche's seven pups, some brown, some white, some piebald, yapped and crawled and snuggled together under the wagon in a little ring of their own, which was a worn-out motor-tyre set down on a worn-out wool skirt of Marta's. The only trick they had learnt so far was the trick of getting first place at Blanche's teats when she came to feed them, but in another year or two—there'd be a gallant troupe of buffers for you!

Yes, considering all things, Ashbourne's couldn't complain; Lucia and Janos were a great attraction, and those who understood such things recognized in Luke's performances a mastery that deserved a more magnificent setting. Prices were raised to sixpence and threepence, and after his clown act Janos went round with a hat, and his six-year-old charms melted the hearts and lightened the pockets of many in the audience.

One early morning in June, Marta and Lucia and Janos were looking out at the dewy world over the lower flap of the wagon door and Luke was walking alongside Dolly and Sandow. They were travelling slowly northward along a level road in Bedfordshire, and the sun was just rising when they saw, far off and travelling equally slowly southward, a wagon drawn by a couple of tall piebalds.

"I ought to know them prads," muttered Marta, screwing up her eyes.

At the same moment, Luke turned with a shout: "Lorraine's wagon! See, them's the old piebalds!"

He urged on Dolly and Sandow to their willing utmost and, as the two wagons drew nearer and nearer, Luke could hear a chorus of excited barkings, welcoming him, it seemed, out of some ghostly circus pitch of by-gone days. Surely, surely, those were the voices of Judy and Draggles and their sons and daughters! "It's poodles' barkings, any road," thought Luke.

The wagons drew up opposite each other, Marta, Lucia and

Janos leaped out from the one, Frieda stepped out from the other. "Ach mein Gott!" exclaimed Frieda, as she embraced Luke and Marta.

Such a changed Frieda! Maybe, if it hadn't been for that something about a person which, for close friends, never changes, they would not have recognized her. Frieda had grown lean, and Frieda had grown wrinkled, and her once flaxen hair was now more grey than flaxen. Her calm blue eyes were calm still, but they were sunken, and there was an expression of deep melancholy in them. But there, she was overjoyed to see them. They pulled the wagons to the side of the road, and then they sat on a daisied bank with the beams of the risen sun gilding their faces, and told each other all the news.

"Yes, I am quite alone," said Frieda. "The war took my Herman. Was not that a waste of a good life? Alphonse died brave, as he would have wished to die, but my Herman," her lips worked and tears stood in her eyes, "he died for nothing at all."

"And but a lad," said Marta.

"Not twenty," said Frieda.

"And would have made the best rider in all England," added Luke. He glanced at Frieda. There was a question he wanted to ask, and yet he was half afraid to ask it. "Any news of Otto?" he said slowly.

"Nothing," answered Frieda. "Nothing at all."

Luke shifted uneasily. He could never quite get over the feeling that some shot from his rifle, some stab from his bayonet, might have killed Otto, the best pal he had ever possessed. "Oh well, there it is," he said at last.

"Aye, there it is," muttered Marta.

And, "There it is," agreed Frieda, wiping her eyes. "And how's things been with you, Luke?"

"Not too good, and not too bad. Elsie and I have parted."

"That's bad, my word!" said Frieda. "But she never was what you would call cut out for the life."

"No," answered Luke quietly, "I reckon she wasn't."

"So now he has to put up with me for a helpmeet," said Marta, grinning.

"Put up with!" exclaimed Luke. "The way you talk!"

Frieda let the poodles out of the wagon, and they sniffed and sneezed, and barked and ran round in circles, and wagged their tails and cocked their ears at Blanche and Mr. Brown. There were eight of them, including an amiable but much sobered-down Judy. Judy watched the antics of her offspring for a moment or two with a somewhat bored expression; then she yawned, whimpered, laid her head on Frieda's knee and rolled an eye at her mistress.

"No, she does not perform any more," said Frieda. "Neither, since Draggles went, does she breed. Draggles got a kick from a bevy omev at Nottingham Goose Fair, and that was the end of him. Poor Draggles! And Judy had a phantom litter the next time; her body grew big, she made her bed, and waited for her little ones to come. But they did not come. For now she is a widow, like me," said Frieda, stroking the woolly white muzzle that rested on her knee.

Luke said, "Seein' as you're on your tod, why not come along with us? We're but small, but we're doin' tidy."

Ack no, Frieda would remain on her tod. She was used to it now, and she managed to get along. "If I were young and beautiful, I would go with them," she thought, "for then I should be a help. But now, what would I be? A drag, yes, that is all. He has two dogs of his own, and a litter. He does not want me and the poodles." But she did not tell Luke what she was thinking.

"Eh well," said Luke, getting up and stretching. "Must be gettin' along. If you change your mind, Frieda, you know where you're welcome."

"Yes," answered Frieda, "I do know."

She whistled to her troupe and they bounded back into the wagon. The meeting had been a short one, but already they must all hurry to make up for lost time, for none of them could afford to miss a day's work. The piebalds and Dolly and Sandow were roused from their pleasant browsing at the roadside by the brisk commands of their respective owners; heads were flung up, with mouths still full of grass; collars, that had slid forward to throats, swung back into place; hoofs clattered, the wagons were drawn out from the roadside.

"S'long," said Frieda, getting up into her seat.

"S'long," said Luke.

"S'long," said Marta.

"S'long," cried Lucia and Janos, "see you again some day!"

Then the wagons lumbered off in opposite directions.

"That there old war," remarked Marta, when they had reached their pitch on a piece of common on the outskirts of a small village and were busy unpacking; "that durned old war have put a load on that woman's back what she didn't ought to carry, and sorrow in her heart what doesn't belong there. Loads and sorrows, yes, we pick 'em up as we go through life, and they're sent for some purpose, I reckon. But these what Frieda's carrying didn't ought to be permitted."

"I know," answered Luke.

"And I'd like to give the A'mighty a piece of me mind on the subject," went on Marta, hotly, as she tweaked the bridle off Dolly's head.

"The Almighty?" questioned Luke. "He's but the Rum-Cul of the show, I reckon. The best Rum-Cul can't run a show alone."

"Then He should sack His artistes," snapped Marta.

"Maybe that's what He's been doing of," answered Luke. He pondered. God's Circus—and a poor show it had turned out these last years. There was a mistake somewhere, though, because on this Circus good and bad artistes had been sacked together. No, it wasn't quite like that. It was like when some self-opinionated, hot-headed fool stalled his trick and crashed, and caused the death of the good artistes along with his own. Aye, that happened on all shows, at times. "If the Rum-Cul could only learn 'em to think of the show first and themselves last, like old Sam Beckett learned his lot?" he queried.

"To my way of thinking, He best pack up and start again with a less lousy company," said Marta. "Get on there, Dolly, I ain't nowt for yer, fill yer belly with what's growing, while you may. And you two kids, be off to't pump for parni."

## VI

IN this, its second season from the fresh beginning Ashbourne's prospered on the whole. There were good days and there were bad days, but the good days preponderated. By the time they went into winter quarters there was quite a nice little bit of capital tucked away in the blue stocking.

They drew in on to the same piece of common in Sussex, and Luke went up to London, bought himself a tidy suit, and presented himself at an agency in request of work. He got work, he found he had not been quite forgotten; there were still people about who remembered that young Luke Ashbourne had been building up a name for himself before the war. He got a fortnight's engagement in Glasgow, a week in Manchester, a week with Mr. Hessop's successor in Whitfield. Then he went over to Ireland, where Tommy Beckett was running a winter circus in Dublin.

Tommy had managed to keep going during the war, and now with Matthew back, and Matthew's sons and daughters, and the sons and daughters of his dead brother, Jack, he was building up quite a respectable show again. "We ain't exactly been doing swell," explained Tommy, "but then neither have you by the look of things, so if you ain't exactin' as to salary, I'd like your wire act. Roxy'll fix you up with a costume if you ain't got one."

So there was Luke amongst old friends for a month, and though he was sorely tempted to send for Marta and the children, he did not, for he must save every penny, if Castelli's Circus was ever to become more than a figment of his brain.

Roxy immediately set to work on a new Spanish costume for him; the style suited his figure, she said, but it was to be gold and green this time, instead of blue and rose. He was to be billed as Don Lucios, though his features were anything but Spanish. "No matter for that," said Roxy, "figure comes before face." Roxy had grown immensely fat, but she was gay and warm-hearted as ever.

Luke asked for news of Anna. Roxy sighed. "That Leone!" she said, and turned up her great eyes. "Eh, well, she's made her bed to suit herself, and now I s'pose she's got to lie on it."

"I heard as they was doing swell in Norway," said Luke.

"So they was, for a while. But what with bexies and dames that soon come to an end. Dad would have Anna on the show, and welcome, but she won't leave Leone, and he and Dad agree about so well as an elephant and a chimp. And talkin' of elephants brings me in mind of poor Alfy's. He sold the three of them to Harrier's Zoo afore he went, but Dad'll buy 'em back when we can raise the dibs."

Luke wanted more news of Anna. "Where is she now?" he asked.

"Here and there and anywhere," said Roxy, "and doing what she can. Four good kids, and handsome too, but a husband that's no more use than a louse, and ought to be trod on. But there's someone anxious to see you, and that's Checko. Aye, he's stuck to Tommy through thick and thin, an' starved hisself to feed them cats when the war was at its worst."

The same quiet-voiced Checko, not changed in any way, not a day older, it seemed to Luke. He greeted Luke with affection and took him round the cages and into the cages. "You too might have been a trainer of cats," he said. "They have no distrust of you. See, I have some beautiful babies to show you. Are they not without compare, my lion babies? Perhaps, if the Boss will permit, you would carry a cub back to your children?"

The Boss did permit. When the circus closed and Luke went back to Sussex, he took with him a fat, puling, snub-nosed lion cub for Lucia and Janos. The children christened him Stripes, because his broad forehead was striped like a tiger's, and, since they had nowhere else to put him, Stripes lived in the wagon with them.

"Shall I train him?" asked Lucia.

"Aye, when he's grown a bit."

"Stripes will grow *terribly* fast," said Janos serenely. "And when he's big I'll train him too."

But Luke said that Janos must find something else to train, for no lion could serve two masters.

"Stripes, Stripes, Stripes!" said Lucia, kneeling on the floor and putting her face close to the lion cub's. "Pay attention to me, little Stripes. The first lesson you must learn is to know your name."

Luke watched her. Lucia had a way with animals, he had noticed it often, a completely fearless yet gentle and understanding way. Once he would have said proudly, "It's in the blood, you see. Aye, that's the Castelli blood coming out all right." That was the way he had spoken to Elsie in his pride when he used to watch the baby Lucia somersaulting before she could walk, when he took her by her little bare heels and swung her this way and that, when he put her in the river and watched her swim. And now, after all, it seemed that the Castelli blood had nothing to do with it. No matter, it was champion blood, whatever its source, and Lucia was a champion kid. . . . But Elsie, he wished he had not set himself off thinking about Elsie. It gave him a dull pain in his heart, even yet. Maybe it always would. He wondered what she was doing, whether she was married yet. Their lives moved in different worlds, it was not likely he would ever get news of her.

Well, he had done what she asked, though she had had to provide him with the funds to do it, and that had hurt his pride. He had gone to Blackpool with a "piece," a flashy young woman called Pearl Sandishaw, whose parents ran an Aunt Sally and Shooting Booth. And he had hated Pearl and the night he had spent with her, though, as Elsie reminded him, he needn't have been so squeamish, considering the way he had "gone on" with the French tarts. But Pearl wasn't a tart, she was something worse, an avaricious little leech who was willing enough to accommodate himself and Elsie for the sake of a few pounds. Luke had felt sick with disgust of her, and since disgust is not an incentive even to such poor love-making as the circumstances demanded of him, he had spent that night at Blackpool sitting in a chair, whilst Pearl, not at all averse to this arrangement (for she had not so much feeling in her as a doctored she-cat, according to Luke) had sprawled complacently in the double bed, and snored in her sleep with a shrill intermittent snoring.

It made Luke want to go and get drunk, it did, to remember



these things, except assuredly that was not the way that would lead him to Castelli's Circus.

Also he had Blanche's pups to train, mustn't waste time fretting about the past, get busy with the present and create, in imagination, a glorious future. The pups weren't hardly old enough, but he might start them in, if they couldn't do much they could at least look attractive and swell the resources of Ashbourne's for the coming season. "For we'll grow bigger every year or bust," thought Luke, as he whistled Blanche's excited offspring out of their make-shift kennel under the wagon. Here they came, all seven of them, brown, white, and piebald, eyes bright, tongues lolling, tails wagging, eager for their lesson. "It's in the blood *there*, all right," thought Luke, mocking the dull pain that troubled his heart.

Now they had nine buffers, two prads, a pig, a goose, and a lion cub; it was impossible that such a company could all be housed through the summer in one living wagon. Luke set about constructing a travelling wagon for the animals, a wagon with curved canvas top and half-wood and half-canvas sides, reinforced at the corners with thin iron rods to economise the money he must lay out on planking. He bought the undercarriage of a discarded brougham for next to nothing, and on to this he bolted the floor boards of the new wagon. He sold the cart he had used the previous winter for carrying round logs, for, with the wagon to build, he had no time for that business now. He got two pounds for the cart, and two pounds are two pounds, when all's said and done.

But another wagon meant another horse, and that was a serious question. If he could scrape up enough money to buy a good horse, one he could train for the ring, it would be an economy in the long run. Moreover he didn't want to go around with any old thing, he wanted to be proud of his animals. But what had he got that he could realize? Just nothing. When Luke thought about all the money there was in the world, money being chucked about and wasted, too, it made him feel "narked." "I could just about write round beggin' letters," he said to Marta. "If I knew who to write 'em to."

"Aye, that's the point, lad," answered Marta, "who to write 'em to?"

"I *wish*," said Janos, "we had a little elephint to draw the wagon. One I could train. I *wish* I had a little elephint, I do," he repeated with a sigh.

"If I can't buy a good prad I'll have to sell the wagon," said Luke moodily. And that gave him an idea. Why not sell the wagon, paint it up lively and make it attractive-looking, and then set to and build another for himself?

And that's what he did. Caravaning in 1921 was not the craze it was later to become, but already the lure of the open road had seized upon the imaginations of a few enthusiasts. Luke advertised a "one horse caravan for sale, extra light, suit cob." He had fitted up the wagon with a bunk, shelves and corner cupboards, it had windows back and front, and Marta expended a shilling or two on some chintz for curtains, and these, with cream-coloured paint inside and green and white paint outside, they decided ought to soften the heart of some rich flatty into buying it.

His advertisement was answered by a Mr. Lockett, who duly came to inspect the wagon. Mr. Lockett was a frank-eyed youth, who spoke with a most superior Oxford accent, and wore an impeccable suit of Harris tweeds. With him came his girl, a buxom young thing, also in Harris tweeds, with diamond patterns on her wool stockings and brown brogues on her small feet. Dot, as Mr. Lockett called her, went into ecstasies over the wagon, she also went into ecstasies over Stripes and Dolly and Lucia and Janos, and over Barbara the goose, and over Tremendous the pig, and over Blanche and Mr. Brown and their seven children. To amuse her, Luke put Dolly through a few tricks, and Janos did the flip-flaps and benders for her, and Lucia some contortions. Dot said she never did and never had and never could imagine anything so delightful; she confided in Luke, with a winsome smile, that she and Mr Lockett were going to be married, and that they wanted to spend an unconventional honeymoon. "So when we saw your advertisement we thought, why that's the very thing!"

"And how much are you asking?" inquired Mr. Lockett.

Luke looked at that impeccable Harris tweed suit and made a plunge, "£50," he said.

And to his amazement, almost to his dismay, Mr. Lockett answered, "Righto'!"

He had expected to be beaten down. In all the business transactions of a like kind that Luke had experienced, there was a deal of bargaining and haggling on both sides before buyer and seller reached an agreement. He had expected no other from Mr. Lockett, and he would willingly have taken half, or less than half, the price first mentioned. He felt something of a swindler as he watched Mr. Lockett take out his cheque-book and his gold-mounted fountain pen. He almost felt like giving back the cheque that Mr. Lockett handed to him.

"And you're sure a cob can draw it?" asked Mr. Lockett, as he swayed the wagon on its light springs. It seemed the only point he was anxious about.

Yes, Luke was positive about that, quite honestly and sincerely positive. "Provided, of course, you don't over-fill it with your gear," he said.

"Oh," exclaimed Dot, "we shan't do that. We're going to lead the simple life, aren't we, Harry? I shall only take one suitcase."

Marta gave them a cup of tea in her wagon, and Dot said, "You surely don't all sleep in here, do you?" And then she blushed, because she was a very well brought up young woman, and she was afraid she had said something not quite in good taste. But Marta laughed and said, bless the lass, of course they did, and Stripes also. And Dot said, *did* Luke think Stripes would bite her if she picked him up, because she'd just *love* to, and Luke said no, he didn't think so, and Dot risked it and exclaimed at the great solid weight of Stripes' paws.

"Now," she said triumphantly, "I've nursed a real live lion! What do you think of that, Harry?"

"I think it's O.K." said Harry, and Dot said they mustn't waste any more of these kind folks' time, and so they got up to go. Dot told Luke she'd never enjoyed a morning so much in her life, and when they were outside the wagon she whispered to Harry, and Harry whispered to her, and Dot came back with two half-crowns and said, *if* the children wouldn't be offended?

"But I reckon I've faked 'em," said Luke remorsefully, as

he watched them, in their Harris tweeds, walking arm in arm across the common.

"Pooh!" said Marta. "They've got a-plenty and we haven't, and the wagon's a sound wagon."

"Yes," said Luke, "but——"

"There's no buts about it, lad," retorted Marta, "because everyone's well satisfied. You can buy your prad, and they can have their honeymoon. What was that she called their honeymoon?"

"Un-conventional," said Luke.

"And what might that mean?" asked Marta.

"I don't know," answered Luke.

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## V I I

"I know the very prad, if I can get him," said Luke, "and I won't grudge the whole fifty shiners for him. Not more'n five, or maybe six year old, and bred and trained on Packford's Circus what sold up in 1918. I see him when I was working in Norfolk at them stables, and thinks I, 'you're the prad for me.' Waste of talent it were, to see him canterin' the young flatties up and down. I'll take a journey up to Norwich, Gran'an, and see what I can do."

Luke went to Norwich and returned pleased as could be, with a broad-backed, round-crouped dapple horse, whose gentle eyes and affectionate disposition boded well for his behaviour in the ring.

"He's not what you'd call breedy, exactly," said Marta critically.

"Nay," answered Luke, "but see the ampleness! Mick Harvey, what's Boss at the stables, said the young flatties was in danger of gettin' barrel-legged by striding of him, so I paid but forty of them shiners. What shall we call him, Gran'an, for his stable name's Dinkie, which don't suit me, though Mick argued it went down well with the young donas."

"Call him?" said Marta. "Call him Herald, in hopes of better days to come."

"He'll look good with Sandow," said Luke, "same height an' all, and if we can't match, it's well to have a tidy contrast. Now Lucia and me can work the *pas-de-deux*. Though I could wish old Sandow were more soople in his gait. Come on, Herald, my brahve, and let's rub up your memory of circus days. You belong to Janos," he added, for he remembered that Lucia had appropriated Stripes, and he had not yet compensated Janos for his disappointment over that. "So up on his back, son, and help me work him."

"Eh Herald," cried Janos in high glee. "Eh my prad, don't it gladden your heart that you belong to me?"

Herald soon proved that he had forgotten nothing of his old

training. He cantered cheerfully round inside the ring that Luke had marked out with rope and pegs, and never attempted to leap outside it. He and Sandow nibbled shoulders and agreed that it would be pleasant to perform together.

Luke set to work on an animal wagon, similar to the first he had made, but bolder in its paint work, and fitted with travelling compartments for Stripes, and Barbara and Tremendous, and the dogs, instead of with shelves and cupboards. At first Stripes did not like Blanche and Mr. Brown and their progeny, he snarled and lashed out with his heavy paws whenever any of the dogs came near him. But he had to get used to them, and Lucia put a collar and chain round his neck, and a collar and chain round Mr. Brown's neck, and walked them about together, and she put Blanche to sit on Stripes' back whilst she kept the cub occupied with bits of raw meat, and by and by they were feeding out of the same dish, and if there was some snarling during the process, it was playful snarling with no malice in it.

"He's growing every day, ain't he, Dad? See," she dangled a piece of meat above Stripes' snub nose, and Stripes danced and stretched for it with grasping claws, "He'll up on his hind legs a'ready. When may I learn him to sit up and beg for it proper?"

"Not yet," answered Luke. "Musn't worrit a baby." He did not want to disappoint Lucia, but he foresaw the time fast approaching when Stripes would be shut behind bars, and it would not be Lucia who would go in through the cage door and "learn him." "I'll have summut else for her by that time," he thought. "A young kangaroo, maybe."

That year, by the time the new wagon was finished, and the *pas-de-deux* act rehearsed and in shape, they were later than usual in setting out. The buds were already big on the trees, and the birds in full chorus, as Ashbourne's journeyed by slow stages westward. A better show this season. Janos, besides his clown act with the pig and the goose, was able to do some riding, and, though Luke would have considered Dolly a more suitable mount for him, Janos insisted that his first equestrian display should be performed with his own prad, Herald. So Janos did knees-up on Herald's back, and skipped carefully from one foot to the other, whilst Blanche sat on Herald's croup with a jockey

cap set rakishly on her silky white head, and Mr. Brown and the seven sons and daughters frisked after them round the ring. And though there was not much in this little act when you came to analyse it, it was somehow very charming, and the flatties applauded it vociferously.

Lucia had learned the tumbler trick, in which she balanced a glass of coloured water on her forehead and, without spilling a drop, lay prone, and passed a hoop over her head and under her body, and that trick went down well, too, for Lucia's grave air of concentration, the precision of her actions, and the grace of her slowly and carefully moving limbs, were pretty to watch, and the beaming smile and exultant caper she gave, when at last, the trick was over, she leaped to her feet, made a piquant contrast to the demure vigilance of her earlier manoeuvres.

Lucia also brought Stripes into the ring, leading him by a red cord, attached to a red collar with brass bells on it. There was nothing in this act, at all, on Stripes' part, but Lucia made something out of it by doing a spring somersault or two over him. And, after all, the audience could look at Stripes, which was a privilege they didn't get every day, and it filled in a gap whilst Luke was changing from one costume to another.

But perhaps the triumph of that season was the *pas-de-deux*, with Luke bestriding Sandow and Herald, and Lucia poised on his shoulders or head in a variety of graceful attitudes. It made Marta both laugh and weep to watch that act, for it had been one of her own triumphs long, long ago, in the days of Castelli's Circus.

Ashbourne's was carrying a few benches that year, not more than half a dozen, because of the weight, but for a seat on those benches they ventured to charge a shilling; eight or nine people could be squeezed on to each, and occasionally the benches were crowded. "Them as don't go forrard goes back," Luke remembered Sam Beckett's words. Good, there was to be no going back about Ashbourne's.

Marta, with Janos up beside her, driving Herald, and Luke walking beside Sandow, they pushed on into Cornwall for the early summer "Feasts." The biggest, the feast of Corpus Christi, was held at Poldroon, opening the week after Pentecost.

All Monday, wagons, steam lorries, cocoanut shies, Aunt

Sally's, merry-go-rounds and swing-boats were arriving. The steep hill up to the fair ground was thronged throughout the day with straining horses, slowly moving engines, piled vehicles and hot, dusty, and loudly shouting men and women.

Ashbourne's arrived late; they had had a breakdown on the way, one of the springs of the living wagon had broken, and when Luke tried to patch it up temporarily with stout wire, he found that the leaves were rusted through and through. They simply crumbled to bits in his hand, and there was nothing for it but to make a long pause at a blacksmith's shop whilst new leaves were made and fitted.

The sun was near setting when they reached Poldroon Fair Ground. Most of the showmen had already taken their stands, the wealthier shows, big roundabouts and the like, occupying the centre of the ground, the smaller shows ranged in a double square round them, with broad alleyways left for the expected crowds. Near the gate a high, painted tower (down whose steep runway the inhabitants of Poldroon, balanced on sliding mats, would presently be screaming their way) gleamed in the reddening sun. Clustered about the tower, under the shadows of the trees, the vendors of ice-cream, chip potatoes, nougat, gingerbread farings and fizzy drinks, were already displaying their wares to tempt the appetites of those townsfolk who had strolled up on the eve of the fair to see what was going on.

"Bigger than ever but not so good as the last"—it was the same verdict every year.

The place allocated to Ashbourne's was a modest one on the extreme right at the top of the fair ground, farthest from the main gates. Luke got busy unpacking and erecting his tent, a job over which his neighbours, seeing him single-handed, gave generous help. On one side of him was a booth belonging to a strapping young woman who exhibited herself (as lightly clad as was lawful) under the alluring appellation of The Classical Venus. On the other side was a Hall of Mirrors.

Having put up his tent, Luke left Marta and the children to prepare the evening meal, and hurried off to the kennels a mile distant, to procure a supply of horse flesh for Stripes. The feeding of Stripes was a matter that had to be dealt with seriously;



inquiries had to be made and messages sent forward to ensure an adequate weekly supply.

Twilight had already fallen when Luke, with a sack over his shoulder, was returning from the kennels through the narrow streets in the upper part of the town. He was keenly hungry. Whistling softly, and with no other thought in his head but his supper, he had just passed the open door of the Fire Engine Inn, when he was seized roughly from behind by the arm, and a hoarse voice bawled, "Caught you at last, you bloody punker!"

Luke swung round and stared into close-set eyes that blinked fiercely up at him from under a very wide peaked cap. "Caw! It's Hiram!" exclaimed Luke.

"Don't Hiram me, you sod!" cried the owner of the peaked cap. "For I've a mind to knock you down."

"What you mean?" demanded Luke. "Take your hands off! Do you want my fist in y'eye?"

Apparently Hiram did not. He had been drinking, it was evident, but he was not yet too far gone not to respect Luke's powerful fist. He was a little man, with a patchy red face, bottle shoulders, and a blue and yellow handkerchief fastened with a brass pin round a long and pathetically scraggy throat. He dropped his hold on Luke's arm, but he continued to talk threateningly. He wound up a somewhat incoherent oration by inviting Luke to step inside and he'd "tell him orf."

"I'm in a hurry, cul," explained Luke.

"Did I wunst do yer a good turn, or didn't I? Answer me that!" bawled Hiram.

"Aye, you did," said Luke, "and I ain't forgotten it."

It was in 1919 when, after a week of bad weather, Ashbourne's resources had become so reduced that they had arrived at Sharlington Fair Ground without even a loaf of bread for the children's supper. Marta had gone to borrow bread from the stall next to them, which happened to be Hiram Trevithick's Cocoanut Shy, and Hiram had lent them not only bread but tea, and a quarter-filled pot of plum and apple jam.

"Not forgotten it, by Christ!" shouted Hiram. "And this is how he rewards me!"

"Can I aid you any, then?" asked Luke.

"*Can* he aid me any!" cried Hiram, to an elderly man who had stopped and was regarding the pair with curiosity. "You hear him? *Can* he aid me any? And he done me the worst wrong that ever any man did!"

"*Me?*" said Luke in bewilderment.

"Yes, you!" shouted Hiram Trevithick shaking a knobbled fist. "I says you and I means you!" He danced up to Luke, made as if to take off his coat, thought better of it, and stepped backwards into the gutter.

"I wasn't aware of it," answered Luke.

"Ho! So you wasn't aware of it," mimicked Hiram Trevithick, making feints at Luke from a safe distance. "But Pearl was aware of it, and I was aware of it, and if you don't make me an apology for what you done, there isn't a blurry native in this blurry town as shan't be aware of it!"

Hiram Trevithick was still shouting. Luke glanced round uneasily; a little crowd was beginning to gather, men grinning expectantly in anticipation of a row. Luke didn't want a row; once the rozzers got you in their bad books it was difficult to get out again. And what had Pearl to do with it? Durn it, he must get to the bottom of this. "O.K. Hiram," he said, "I'll come inside and we'll talk over whatever 'tis. Only quit bawling, cul, or we'll both be jugged."

"Engine eightpenny is what I drink," growled Hiram, as, somewhat mollified, he followed Luke into The Fire Engine Inn.

Luke ordered two pints of eightpenny, a heady home brew for which the Fire Engine was noted. He saw to his relief that the narrow saloon bar was empty, so there, having dumped his sack on a bench, he took a seat opposite Hiram, and set the two glasses on the table between them. "Now," he said, "let's hear what's narked you."

"I'm a peaceable man," grumbled Hiram, wiping froth from his mouth with the back of his hand. "But right is right, and you've done a bad job by me. No sooner had I wedded my missus, her what was Pearl Sandishaw, when her says to me, 'Hiram,' her says, 'I may as well tell you first as last, I've got a little come-by-chance, and all along of that scoundrel what goes by the name of Ashbourne—chrissen name, Luke.'"

"It's a lie, then," said Luke.

"Time, place and circumstance all gove," went on Hiram, raising his voice and bringing his small fist down on the table. "And a divorce the upshot."

"I know," said Luke.

Durn it, he didn't want to talk about it. No, by God he didn't. It brought back memories of things best forgotten. "I never so much as touched her," he said, and got up abruptly to order another drink, to still the pain that with the thought of Elsie hung heavily about his heart.

"I'll take a pint on that statement, if you please," said Hiram. "I'm a reasonable man, but it'll take some washing down, will that statement."

"So you never so much as touched her, eh?" he giped, when Luke came back with the two filled glasses.

"No," answered Luke. "I set in a chair all night."

"Haw! haw! haw! So you set in a cheer all night? And wheer did Pearl set if it ain't asking too much?"

"She didn't sit nowhere," answered Luke after a long drink. "She was in the bed."

"She was in the bed, was she?" cackled Hiram Trevithick. "That's a good 'un. He sot in a cheer and Pearl was in the bed!"

"And she snored," added Luke, for suddenly, as the potent Engine eightpenny distilled its sorcery across his unaccustomed brain, memory took a revolution and presented him with comedy for tragedy.

"Have one on me," said Hiram, whose indignation seemed to be melting away under the spell of the same bright sorcery. "Go on, have one . . . And how much did you guv her for that," he asked, slopping the contents of the two glasses as he set them down.

"Five shiners," said Luke. "What was agreed on."

"Five shiners for setting on a chair a'night. Gor! If that ain't the biggest joke I ever heered tell of!"

It was a joke, Luke could see that plainly, but it was a joke that made his heart ache. The ache grew smaller and the joke bigger after a few more glasses. After several more the joke had grown so big that it seemed to enclose the pin point of a pain on all

sides . . . And eventually the world became one vast joke and the pain was not even a memory.

Arm in arm, he and Hiram Trevithick left the Fire Engine Inn at closing time. Arm in arm they made their unsteady way to the fair ground. "Be careful of the rozzers, be careful, cul," mumbled Luke, as he hauled Hiram Trevithick back from the edge of the pavement.

"Are you—pr'pared," asked Hiram solemnly, "step up t'my wagon 'n loo' missus 'n th' eye 'n say to she, Pearl will you say, y'blurry liar?"

"I'll say that," chuckled Luke.

"Haw! haw! haw!" chortled Hiram Trevithick, "I allus knew's Pearl's blurry liar."

Hiram's wagon was drawn in under a tree near the painted tower, that now reared like a ghostly unlit giant candle under the faint summer stars.

"Missus!" bawled Hiram, kicking on the bottom step of the wagon, when he and Luke reached it. "Here's frien' t'see you! Frien' wha's come t'say——" The wagon door was flung open, yellow light rayed outward to illuminate the two jovial men at the foot of the steps, and against the light stood Pearl with her hair in curlers and her arms a-kimbo. "Wha's come t'say," shouted Hiram with a long yell of laughter, "as y'are a blurry liar!"

It was Pearl's turn to yell then, and yell she did out of sheer fright. The sudden and unexpected appearance of Luke made her fly into a hysterical rage of denunciation. She cursed the pair of them up hill and down dale, whilst they leaned together and roared with laughter, and, when she could think of no more to say, she slammed the door and locked it. And Hiram Trevithick, still giggling ghoulishly, escorted his dear pal Luke across the fair-ground.

"Haw! haw! haw!" spluttered Hiram, "I got me own back on she. B'gor I did, proper! And I've been waiting m'chance to get m'own back for years upon years, upon——"

Luke had a job to shake him off when they came to Marta's wagon, for Hiram was quite ready to wander up and down in this jovial fashion for a long time yet. He hadn't half done telling Luke the joke of how he had got his own back on Pearl, but Luke

was tired of listening. Luke felt giddy and had a longing to lie down, he gave Hiram Trevithick a playful punch which sent him sprawling on his hands and knees in the wet grass, said "S'long, cul," and staggered up the steps into Marta's wagon to find they had a visitor.

"Anna!" he said thickly, and advanced towards her with outspread arms.

Anna gave one glance at him and sprang to her feet. "So you're going the same way as Leone!" she cried.

"No 'm not, Anna, here, wa' a minute!"

But she dodged past him and ran out into the night.

"Wha's matter with Anna?" he asked, smiling foolishly and swaying before Marta.

Marta narrowed her lips. "You best go to kip, old son," she said.

And Luke, needing no second bidding, reeled to his bunk.

Lucia, who had been waiting to give Stripes his supper, took some meat from the sack, cut it into small pieces, and went out with a lantern. Janos followed her.

"Didn't my Dad talk funny?" he said, "And didn't he smell funny? I know what, he's been at the bevy."

"Shut your lying mouth!" cried Lucia fiercely. "My Dad don't do such things."

## V I I I

LUCIA woke before dawn, and it was Stripes' babyish attempts at imitating a grown-up lion that woke her. Stripes had not yet reached that dignified age when he would rise up and herald the approach of the sun with a challenging roar—the lord of beasts saluting the lord of the sky. But this morning it seemed that he was going through an unsuccessful rehearsal for that majestic future performance.

“Wau-augh!” and then a spit and a choke, rather like a big tom-cat with the asthma.

Lucia sat up and rubbed her eyes with her knuckles. Janos twittered in his sleep, rolled over and lay still. On the other side of Janos, Gran'an was breathing heavily, and in the lower bunk her bad Dad, who had certainly been to the bevy last night, though Lucia had hotly denied it to Janos, lay like a log, with his boots sticking out from under the blanket and his coat pushed up round his neck.

“Wau-augh!” then growlings. What was the matter with Stripes? Cautiously Lucia swung her feet over the edge of the bunk, wrapped a red shawl of Marta's round her shoulders, and stole out of the wagon.

No smoke rising yet from any of the wagons; tents and canvas-sided booths dark with the night damp and silvery grey over the dark with beaded drops of dew. Taut ropes beaded also, a drop on every rough little hairy fibre along their length. Engines covered up for the night, show fronts boarded, a frail gleam of fluted brass here and there, a frail star drowning in the paling east; trees dark and heavy, with unstirring leaves, enclosing the close-packed, pointed and rounded roofs of a canvas world; at the far end of the ground the summit of the tower, sombrely red, rising above the trees; at the near end, beyond a lane of square-shaped booths, the striped tilting of Leone's Circus looming up with a tattered flag drooping languidly from the top of its one king pole.

On the grass in front of Marta's wagon, a small man, with

a blue and yellow handkerchief round his neck and a peak cap by his elbow, lay sprawled in sleep. Nothing moving, everything so quiet except for Stripes' vexed attempts at roaring. "Nothing in the world's awake," thought Lucia with a little shiver of excitement, "'cept Stripes and me."

The animal wagon was drawn up by the side of Ashbourne's tent; Lucia stepped that way on her bare feet that the dew wetted. Yes, now there was something else awake; Barbara the goose was cackling, Stripes had roused her. Blanche growled, Mr. Brown growled, Blanche's sons and daughters yapped, Tremendous, the pig, gave a squeal and a grunt, the animal wagon began to rock gently as one after another its inmates stirred. What was up in there?

Lucia, about to mount the steps to the wagon, stood still and sniffed. A breath of wind blew lightly round the corner of Ashbourne's tent, and on the wind, mingled with the stuffy smell of wet canvas, came a strong, recognizable odour. Lucia had smelled it yesterday, when she and Janos had been poking round Leone's Circus, before Leone's missus came to call on Gran'an. Wild beast smell! Leone's lions—but the wind was not blowing from there.

The next moment a great tawny body bounded from behind Ashbourne's tent, and, across a space of thirty feet, Lucia and a full grown lioness stood and stared at one another.

A lioness loose! What do you do when there is a lioness loose? If you are a flattie you scream and run, and the lioness pounces on you, and maybe tears you to pieces. If you are Lucia you remember that you are a potential lion-trainer, that here is your opportunity: Fate sounds a challenge, and a kind of glory in you leaps to answer it.

"Meo-w-w-w-w-w," Lucia made a noise that was something between a roar and a mew, an imitation of Stripes at his most pleased. And "meo-w-w-w," she repeated as, step by quiet step, she moved towards the lioness. The lioness' tail swayed irritably from side to side, she wrinkled up her nose and snarled.

"Meo-w-w-w-w-w," repeated Lucia, "ah brahve! ah brahve!" she coaxed. The first lesson you have to learn is to know your name—but what was the name of this lioness? The lad who was feeding the beasts last night had told her their names,

but which was this, Pocohontas, or Gwendoline, or Venus, or Boadicea? Not Pocohontas, because Pocohontas had a black tassel to her tail, Lucia remembered it distinctly.

"Gwendoline!" she said loudly and boldly. But the lioness only lashed her tail, wrinkled up her nose and snarled again.

"Meo-w-w-w-w-w! Ah brahve!" Lucia reassured her. "What is it then, my beauty? Did you get lost, did you get lost then, my lovely, my lovely big lass?"

The lovely big lass took a leap backwards as Lucia approached. She crouched slightly and glanced round her like a nervous dog seeking where best to run. But that would not do. When a wild beast is nervous, it is also dangerous.

"Venus!" hazarded Lucia, and though it was but a hazard she spoke firmly and in a voice of conviction. "Venus!" she repeated with a rising sense of glorious certainty. The lioness was pricking her ears, her tail had ceased to swing. "Venus! Come here! Venus, Venus!" And like an obedient dog, Venus loped to meet her.

Lucia patted the broad head, she took off her red shawl and wound it round the great neck. "Ah brahve, ah brahve, Venus, my lovely lass!" Holding the ends of the red shawl firmly, she was moving off now towards Leone's big-top. One hand was on Venus's furrowed brow, and pace by pace Venus padded at her side.

Behind Leone's big-top stood the lion wagons. The door of one cage was swinging open. "Up she goes," said Lucia, giving Venus a push. Venus bounded into the cage, Lucia slammed the door to, and, reaching tiptoe, pulled home the bolt. Then on her bare feet and in her patched calico nightgown she executed a dance of triumph, whilst, inside the cage, Venus playfully shook and tore at the red shawl that dangled from her neck.

That night, Ashbourne's tent was packed to suffocation at every performance, and a crowd swayed and jostled round the entrance, waiting to get in. Every one wanted to see the little girl who had captured the lioness. The local paper, issued at four o'clock in the afternoon, had flaunted the news; there was even a large picture of Lucia, very black and coarse-looking but unmistakably Lucia, on the middle page. For, wakened by the dawn wind and peeping from behind the organ of one of the



merry-go-rounds, whither he had immediately fled for safety, Hiram Trevithick had witnessed the capture and spread the tidings of it far and wide with voluble enthusiasm.

"She's a grand kid, is our Lucia," said Marta, as she put away the night's takings in the blue woollen stocking.

"Aye," said Luke absently.

Lucia and Janos were already asleep. The fair had closed down for the night. The glare of light that had rayed upwards into the deep blue of the evening sky was dwindled now into a warm glimmer of separate lights that shone from wagon doors and windows. Show-women stirred the red coal in their stoves, showmen counted their gains; nobody had done very well that day, except Ashbourne's.

Luke thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out the fourpenny bit. There it lay, now, in the hollow of his palm, his luck, the tiny symbol of the circus ring, silver-pure and shining. But it seemed to Luke to-night that his palm tainted it. "A grand kid"—aye. And how must he have appeared to the grand kid last night? And to Janos? . . . And to Anna?

"I don't know what come over me last night," he said, as he stared moodily at the coin.

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed Marta. "Still fashed about that? Sometime or another time we all come a buster. Forget it, lad."

"I wish I'd had the sense to sleep it off outside—where no one would have seen me," said Luke.

"If you'd a-done that," observed Marta, "our Lucia wouldn't have been in the papers. I don't see you hiding behind an organ along of that Hiram."

"Maybe I'd have been that screwed still as Venus 'ud have mauled me," said Luke bitterly. He put the fourpenny bit back in his pocket and stood up. "Oh well—think I'll take a turn out."

"He's real narked with hisself," thought Marta, as the door closed behind Luke. "And just as well he should be. For he won't go that road again, I'll lay."

Luke wanted to make his peace with Anna. All day he had been recalling the way she had looked at him. What had he said to make her look like that? He couldn't remember. But he remembered what *she* had said. Going the same way as Leone?

No, by God, he wasn't! He wanted to tell her he wasn't; he couldn't sleep till he had told her.

He strolled in the direction of Leone's living wagon, and passed and repassed between the wagon and the big-top, calling to her with a voiceless supplication of the spirit to come out. He couldn't say anything in front of Leone.

From inside the wagon came the clatter of dishes and the sound of voices: Anna's voice, sharp and angry, Leone's voice, frequently shouting. They were having a row; Luke supposed they frequently did have rows—but Anna had "made her bed to suit herself," as Roxy said. Strange that she should have been on the Fair Ground when he arrived yesterday, and he not know it! A come down for one of the Becketts to be travelling fairs. Ups and downs—you were bound to meet them, as Marta said, but this down was Leone's doing . . . Come out, Anna, come out! Can't you hear how my spirit is calling yours?

It seemed to him that, if he remained there thus voicelessly beseeching her for long enough, she was bound to come. He seemed to be looking into her eyes, he could see them so plainly in his mind, just those dark, wide-open, fearless eyes that were for some curious reason so like Lucia's. Yes, if he kept looking into those eyes for long enough, she would come.

Standing in the shadow of the big-top, just out of earshot, for he did not want to hear their quarrelling, Luke saw the window curtains parted and Anna's face peering into the night.

"She'll come," he thought.

Anna opened the wagon door. "Is there any one there?" she asked uncertainly. Then she came down the wagon steps, round under the window and straight towards him.

"Did you—did you call me, Moppits?"

"Aye," said Luke at once, for what had he been doing but calling? "I wanted to speak to you special—to ask your pardon for last night."

Anna said nothing. Luke could see her dimly, backed by the light from the window at the end of the wagon. But he could not see her face, and he did not know whether it was angry or scornful or gentle or sorrowful.

"It was only the second time in my life, Anna," he pleaded. "And the first wasn't my doin' really, because I wasn't much

more'n a kid. And I'm that ashamed I don't know as I could look you in the face, if 't'were light enough. But I ain't going that way, Anna, no, by Christ, I ain't."

"No, Moppits," said Anna gently, "I'm sure you ain't."

"And—and you've forgiven me?"

"Oh yes," answered Anna, "oh yes, Moppits."

"Did—Marta tell you aught about Elsie—she that was my wife?" asked Luke in a low voice.

"She did. And I'm sorry over it."

"It was thinking on Elsie what did it," explained Luke. "Times it makes me feel—oh you don't know how, Anna."

"I do know," said Anna with emotion. Then she threw back her head, and Luke could imagine that he saw her eyes flash. "Don't think on her, Moppits. You've got your life to live."

A figure approached them from the wagon. It was Leone. Luke had seen him earlier in the day. He had grown fat, and the one-time beautiful lines of his face had become lost in a vagueness of flesh that made his eyes seem small and his features weak and inadequate. Not a prepossessing fellow to look at, wasn't Leone, these days.

"What is going on?" asked Leone as he joined them. "Oh, I see. Mr. Moppits! I want a word with you, Mr. Moppits."

"As many as you please," answered Luke.

"Then they will be few," said Leone. "I have one only thing to say to you. You quit this fair."

"And why?"

"Because your girl has stolen my audience. Because my tent to-night is empty. Because it was my lioness, and mine should have been the advertisement."

"Don't be daft," said Anna sharply. "He's booked his joint."

"And I have booked mine," said Leone.

"No you didn't, I did," contradicted Anna. "You've no sense in you to see to anything."

Leone bowed ironically. "It is all the same," he said. "We are here. We pay more, much more than Mr. Moppits. His is a small show, ours a big one. He quits, we stay."

"We all stay," answered Anna.

"We do *not* all stay," said Leone hotly. "How can we work to an empty tent?"

"It won't be the first time," said Anna.

"Shall I see my wife and children starve for the sake of Mr. Moppits?" cried Leone dramatically.

"No," said Anna. "I've a better plan. Moppits shall join us, if he will. My God, it's time I had a man to work for me!" she added bitterly.

"Moppits will quit," repeated Leone fiercely.

"No, Moppits will join us," repeated Anna, equally fiercely. "Do I run this show, or do you? Is it my money you swill down your throat and shower on your donas, or is it yours? Answer me! By Christ, when I married you I didn't do it to knuckle under to a drunken sod! Keep your hands to yourself, or I'll leave you here and now and join up with Tommy. I mean it, and you know I mean it. I'll leave you, and you can swill on what you've left, and it won't be nothing."

"Hear her!" cried Leone, raising his fist to heaven. "Hear her, the peacock!"

But Luke understood that Anna had the upper hand; and more than that he understood. In this proposal of Anna's he realized, more clearly than any assurance of hers could have made him realize, that he was indeed forgiven—that Anna had confidence in him, was in need of his help, and asked for his help, knowing full well that neither now, nor at any future time, would he go the way of Leone.

To understand this made him feel very happy. If he joined forces with her he would work, as never man had worked before, to redeem her broken fortunes. But, whether they joined forces or no, he was forgiven.

"We'll talk on it in the morning, so good-night both," he said. For it seemed almost indecent to stand there listening to their domestic brawling.

## I X

ANNA had won the day with Leone. Ashbourne's and Leone's would henceforth travel the roads as one show. The children were becoming acquainted, and managing it in their own direct manner.

"You're too stupid, you didn't know enough to be frightened," said Vador, the vain.

"It's stupid to be frightened, not to be brave," said Sandro the magnanimous.

"I'll fight you if you like, though you're bigger'n me, I'll fight you till you're in little pieces," said Roberta the fiery.

"And I'll stick the little pieces together, and some of 'em'll be back to front," said Ham the humorous.

Lucia tossed her head. "I don't like any of you," she said. "No, I *don't*."

"But I like Ham," said Janos, putting his arm round the little fellow with the black curls. "I like him nearly so good's I like you, Lucia."

"You've only got one name," said Vador to Lucia, "but I've got three. My name's Raffaello Salvador Fabian."

"And mine's Roberta Veronica Euphrosyne."

"And mine's Maximilian Percy Hammond."

"And mine," said Sandro, "is Allesandro Cyrus Beckett. But Lucia's a pretty name."

"Now then, Jack Spratts," called a squeaky voice, "Time to practise."

Waddling towards them on tiny legs came the dwarf, Twinkles. If you could have seen Twinkles' head detached from his body you would have said, "What a handsome man!" But when you looked at Twinkles' little arms and legs and diminutive body you said, "What a pity!" But Twinkles didn't care what you said. Good Lord, no! He was a philosopher, was Twinkles, and a merry one. Also he was an acrobat, and a good one. To see him at his lightning twisters in the ring, spinning like a striped ball, made you gasp. And to see him throw his spring

somersault over Sandro and Vador and Roberta and Ham, first over one of them, then over two, then over three, and then over all four together, made you exclaim, "How many more can the little fellow manage?" And then a white pony was brought and placed in front of the line of children, and Twinkles somersaulted over the children and the pony as well. And then a black pony was brought and placed at the end of the line of children, and Twinkles took a spring and somersaulted over the black pony and over Sandro and Vador and Roberta and Ham and the white pony, and landed up on his funny little legs, and clapped his funny little hat on his head, and flicked his funny little spats with his funny little hand, as nonchalantly as if he had just hopped over a puddle and lifted his hat to a passer-by in the process. Now Lucia and Janos were to be added to the act—oh yes, Twinkles would throw a somersault over two extra children with all the ease in the world, not a doubt of it, and he would have those two extra children, and Barbara the goose, and Tremendous the pig, cracking wheezes and making merry in the ring, in no time, trust Twinkles for that! And so, it was time to practise.

"And you two giants," said Twinkles to Ham and Janos, "being of a like stature, will work in harness like two cherries on a stalk, so off with your wrap-rascals and follow me."

Anna took Luke round the show. There were four ring horses, two liberties and two rosin backs. There were four lionesses and two lions. There were six performing monkeys and a very amiable stout lady, called Miss Priscilla, who worked them. And there were Bobby and Billy Gough, somewhat past their prime, to be sure, being both now over fifty, but ready as ever to ride, work the rings and the bar—anything, and still billed as The Famous Levant Brothers. There were five very shabby-looking men who, between them, saw to the horses, played the band and helped build up and pull down the one pole tent. "And with Twinkles and the kids, that's all," said Anna, "and every year it's less."

"Not next year it won't be, bet your life," said Luke.

Anna and Leone now performed on the low trapeze. "I wouldn't go up under the dome with him no more for a fortune," said Anna. "And as for them cats, he's scared stiff of them, and yet he'll work them. He goes in to 'em stinking of brandy, and

they've lost what little respect they ever had for him, and I live in terror of the day they'll do him in." She looked at Luke thoughtfully. "Moppits, if I could square Leone, would you work them cats?"

"I would that," answered Luke. "You know I often went in with Checko."

"Then it's a deal," said Anna. "I'll square him."

How she worked! She saw to everything, even to keeping Leone more or less off the booze till the show was ended. She fixed the route, bought the fodder for the horses and the meat for the lions, she cooked for the children and made their costumes and her own, she rode in the ring, she performed on the trapeze with Leone, and on the rings with Bobby and Billy, she was up before dawn and not in bed till after midnight, and she had to endure the constant humiliation of Leone's behaviour, Leone who carried on with every woman who would condescend to carry on with him, who tiddled and lazed and insulted his wife in speech, because he could never get even with her in spirit. And yet, to see Anna, as she smiled and glittered in the ring, you would have said, "There goes a woman who hasn't a care in the world!" And though she was as thin as a lath, she was still very beautiful.

The progress of Leone, since the days when he lorded it on Beckett's Circus, had been one continual slipping down hill. Leone was a supreme egoist. The circus world had never been more to him than a coloured setting in which the priceless gem that was Leone could glitter before all men's eyes: Anna never more than a challenge to his overbearing vanity, a proud spirit whom he, with his male superiority, must humble and bring to heel. But she had refused to be brought to heel: very well, he would show her, he would humble her in other ways, there were more women in the world than Anna and, for a time, because of his beauty and his notoriety, women were his for the taking. Still Anna was not humbled; her spirit was a fiercely burning flame, Leone could not get near that flame, his insolent breath was not powerful enough to quench it. The recognition of this fact galled him beyond all bearing. But when he drank he was able to forget it. So Leone drank—not much at first, but up under the dome a man's judgment must be perfect, his timing flawless, his nerves and muscles under absolute control. The

superb synchronisation of thought, nerve and muscle, which had made Leone's act famous throughout the circus world, began by just a fraction to jangle; he was an artiste, still, but an uncertain one. His "little glasses" were humbling not to Anna, but to himself, his own genius. There was only one way to avoid the consciousness of this glaring truth—more little glasses, and still more. So his work deteriorated, he had fall after fall, he broke his collar bone, his arm, his ankle, he came within an ace of breaking his neck—the flying trapeze had to be abandoned. Then, because the performance on the low trapeze did not satisfy his sense of his own importance, for—good heavens!—with his degenerating physique and his increasing heaviness of body, he was nothing on the low trapeze but a background for Anna's vital charms, because he must be first, not second, he turned to the showing of wild beasts. The great Leone in the steel arena! The world should yet see the great Leone glitter in the midst of dangers, see him accomplishing feats they dared not contemplate, see him, the solitary hero, shut off from them by bars that were the symbol of his mastery and their pusillanimity.

But shut up within those bars Leone was afraid.

"You don't work them cats no more," said Anna one day, when Leone had come out of the steel arena with shaking knees. "They've got your measure, and it's dangerous."

"And who is to work them if I do not?"

"Moppits."

"Moppits!" Leone's tone was withering.

"Very well," said Anna, "we'll sell 'em and buy you some white mice, though I pity any creatures that's left to your mercies."

"If you sell them, I leave the circus," said Leone.

"Leave then," cried Anna, "and good riddance!"

Leone went into the town to forget his sorrows. To teach Anna a lesson he spent the night with a woman. When he returned in the morning he found the circus all packed up and ready to move on.

"So the public did not see the cats last night?" he said.

"That's where you're wrong," said Anna calmly.

"Moppits showed 'em. And Lucia went in with him, and Venus



did her leap over Lucia's head. You should have heard the clappin'."

"Lucia will be torn in pieces," said Leone darkly.

"I don't reckon so," answered Anna. "She ain't took to bevering yet."

"I scorn you!" cried Leone.

"Then we're quits," said Anna . . .

Luke had an idea. "See here," he said to Anna, "we're a tidy show, the kids is great, and there's you and there's me, and six good prads, and the cats, and Priscilla's monkeys, and Twinkles not to be bettered, and Bobby and Billy none too bad, we didn't ought to be travellin' fairs with but an hour's programme. If I was you I'd risk standin' alone. I'll buy one of them motor bikes and travel ahead and book tobers. Give us a bill, a minute, and let's see if we can't make out a two hours' programme."

"We'll do it, Moppits," agreed Anna. "We'll put our backs into it and go ahead. I'm fair sick of goin' down hill."

"Our show," Luke assured her, "is going up, not down. I met a gago last night—a real good chap—what said he'd put up some money to help us on. Circus-mazed he was, and clean gone on the kids. I says no, but I took his address, and once we're sure of ourselves I'd advise you to take his offer and pay him five per cent."

"Moppits," said Anna, "how have I done without you all these years?"

"Anna," said Luke happily, "we can do more together than we can on our tods, that's certain."

So, for the rest of that season, Leone's and Ashbourne's turned their back on the fair grounds, and tried their luck as an independent show. And because both Luke and Anna were determined to succeed, they did succeed, in a modest way. Luke travelled ahead on a motor bicycle and booked the grounds, leaving Lucia to pack the wagon and one of Anna's men to drive it. He had to be content with small places where rents were cheap, but he chose those places carefully, with a view to population, facilities for getting to the field, and a dearth in the neighbourhood of other attractions, and they were usually fortunate in having a sufficient audience. Anna kept accounts and watched

every penny. Each Sunday morning she gave Leone a small allowance, and for the rest of that day he was drunk to the world; on Mondays he was depressed and irritable with her, and on Tuesdays he was begging from her, and on Wednesdays cursing her, and on Thursdays trying, by every subtle manœuvre he could devise, to get hold of her keys. And sometimes he did get hold of them, and a week's profits would vanish. But, after such a catastrophe, when it came to Sunday morning Anna had the upper hand again, for she refused to give him anything.

"I will shoot myself," threatened Leone.

"No you won't" said Anna, "you love yourself too well."

"I will shoot that Moppits!" cried Leone.

"And get yourself hanged," said Anna, "a pretty finish for you!"

"You have the heart of a stone," said Leone.

"Maybe," answered Anna.

"And you tell me you are to bear me another child," said Leone. "But I think you will bring forth a scorpion."

## X

ONE early afternoon in September, Leone reclined at his ease, legs crossed and stretched out on a settle in the lounge of a pleasant inn, whose hospitable open doors stood, very conveniently, just opposite the circus field. That afternoon it seemed to Leone that all was right with the world. To begin with, to-morrow was Sunday, the day when he rose at what hour he pleased, dressed as slowly as he pleased, and received from the stingy-hearted Anna the allowance that turned the day into one long and glorious dissipation. But that was not all; even though to-day was only Saturday, he had taken a rise out of Anna, and he had money in his pocket. Anna had hidden her keys in a new place. Bene! Anne was not clever, Leone was, and Leone had discovered her secret. That morning, whilst she was interviewing the tober omeys, he had nimbly run over in his mind every previous place of concealment, and, eliminating them one by one, he had speedily arrived at the conclusion that there remained but one corner where the keys could be hidden, he had looked in that corner and—there they were.

True, he had not found very much, so little indeed that he suspected Anna of having handed over the bulk to Moppits for safe keeping—a dirty trick! Still, he had found enough for the day. So here was Leone, glass at elbow, basking in the sunlight that streamed in benison over him from the window above the settle; the great Leone who, at such moments, knew himself once more a consummate artiste, the superior of all men, and most certainly of all women. Anna! Leone shrugged; though she would not admit it, he had Anna under his thumb. Could she live without him? No. Was she not always slaving for him? Yes. And did she not know that there were dozens of beautiful women who would sell their souls to possess what she professed to scorn? Was he not, at that very moment, wearing, on the middle finger of his right hand, a ring with a priceless diamond in it, a ring given to him only a few years ago by a real countess,

such a very beautiful and love-sick lady? Leone held up his hand to the sunlight and the big diamond sparkled at him reassuringly.

"If the worst comes to the worst, I am worth a lot of money to you," said the diamond to Leone.

Leone shook his head and smiled at the diamond. "Never—so long as I can continue to circumvent my little Anna. My little Anna is, after all, so very simple."

So Leone smiled at the diamond, and the diamond sparkled and winked at Leone, and the joke that was the circumventing of Anna glittered through and through the sunlight that caressed the pair of them, and added a lustre to the diamond and warmth to Leone's blood.

He sat there until he was politely requested to leave at half-past two. And then, as he sauntered across to the circus ground, he discovered that he was drowsy and that his head ached. "Plenty of time for a nap before the show," thought Leone, and finding his wagon empty of all annoyances, he lay down on his bunk and immediately fell asleep.

When he woke the sun was low, and from inside the big-top came laughter, the cracking of the whip and the rousing music of the band. Leone yawned, got up and stretched out his hand to the stool where his trapeze costume, the white tights and the white tunic, and the green and gold sequin stomacher, should be laid out ready for him. Not there! Leone rummaged. Not anywhere! He knew what that meant, it had happened before, it was a great insult, he would not endure that it should happen again. Cursing under his breath, Leone got into his dressing-gown, a silken though faded magnificence that told of more prosperous days, and hurried over to the big-top.

As he went in through the back entrance, Twinkles and his troupe of excited children were just capering out and, hand in hand, Anna and Luke, both in white tights and tunics with gold and green sequined stomachers, were entering the ring for the trapeze act. *Leone's* trapeze act! Yes, it was a very great insult.

"It will not happen once again," said Leone to Anna, when that act was over. "I forbid it."

"It will happen whenever it is necessary," answered Anna haughtily.

"It will not happen to-night," said Leone.

"Very well. Keep sober," flashed Anna.

"Why did you not wake me?" said Leone, tense with indignation. "I know why you did not. It is because you prefer to work with *him*."

"I very much prefer it," answered Anna. "His breath is clean."

"You are a whore," said Leone softly. "He makes love to you, and you give him your money. You think I am blind, but I have known it for a long time."

Without a word, Anna walked away from him. "And that," Leone said to himself, "is my proof that I am right." It made Leone feel inches taller to have supplied himself with a sufficient justification for all future misdemeanours.

"Yes, she is a whore," he thought, "I do not forget it."

That evening, Leone hanging by his hocks from the trapeze bar smiled down at Anna, and Anna, as she grasped his wrists and went through her dislocations, smiled up at Leone, but every now and then their smiling lips spoke words that were anything but pleasant.

"I have found you out," said Leone, smiling down at Anna, "you are a whore."

"Can't you think of something new to say?" answered Anna, smiling up at Leone.

"You are clever, aren't you?" sneered Leone, still smiling.

"If you think so," answered Anna, gazing rapturously up at him.

"I will put an end to you both," said the smiling Leone.

"So you say," answered the smiling Anna.

Now the trapeze was set going for the grand finale. Anna's feet were crooked over Leone's wrists, her hands grasped his, her body was bent backward in the nest-hang. And as they swung—

"I mean it," Leone called down to Anna, "I will put an end to you both!"

And Anna, as like a darting swallow she flew backwards and forwards, and beamed first to one side, then to the other, at the admiring flatties, turned her head still farther to one side,

cast an eye upwards to Leone, and called, "I've heard that before!"

The words became the measure of their swinging. Backwards and forwards, faster and faster, higher and higher, with Anna occasionally dropping to a hang to increase the swing, the band louder, the smiles more triumphant, the words rising from the one and falling from the other at the limit of every swing.

"An end to you both!"

"I've heard that before!"

"An end to you both!"

"I've heard that before!"

"An end to you both!" Christo! Was he never to have the last word?

"I've heard——"

In an excess of temper, Leone let go Anna's hands, jerked his wrists from her grasp, her feet from his arms, and sent her flying forward to the sawdust in the ring.

She fell on her side. She leaped to her feet, she pirouetted, tossed her hair back and, smiling, extended her arms to the flatties. Leone swung up on to the trapeze bar, turned a circle, leaped to the ring, gave Anna his hand. Smiling together now, with backward tilted heads, they raised one the right arm, one the left to the flatties, then, to a tumult of applause they ran from the ring, whilst the band banged out a spirited exit.

"It was your own fault," said Leone. "Are you hurt?"

"No," answered Anna, with trembling lips, "*I* am not hurt."

In the night, Anna lay writhing in the bunk beside the sleeping Leone. She had known pains of this kind before, but never half such bad ones, and, however severe, these pains should not have come upon her for some months yet. She stifled a moan, shook Leone and gasped, "Fetch a doctor, quick! *Quick*, I tell you!"

In the morning, at an hour when she should have been up and bustling over breakfast, Anna was still lying in the bunk. And beside her, in a white cardboard shoe-box, lined with cotton wool, lay a strange little waxen shape, a half-formed image of an unrealized hope.

"*Noze*, you see what you have put an end to," said Anna bitterly. "It would have been a girl. I wanted another girl, bad. Take and bury it."

Leone went out with the cardboard box. When he came back: "Anna mia," he pleaded, "for the dear love of Christ, give me my allowance. I am faint. I cannot endure it!"

Anna put her hand under the mattress and tossed him a bag of money. "Take it!" she cried. "Take all there is! Go and get drunk—and leave me in peace!"

"I have taken only my allowance," answered Leone with dignity. He handed her back the bag and went out, feeling very much injured.

Luke came into the wagon with a cup of tea. "Marta sent it," he said. "She'll be over directly. Just givin' the kids their breakfast. How's it goin' with you?"

"All right now," answered Anna. "But I'm finished for this season, Moppits."

"We'll manage," said Luke. "Sandro can do summat on Dolly. And maybe Lucia could work the trapeze."

"Not with Leone!"

"No, with Sandro. I'll coach 'em a bit. They won't do much, but they'll look pretty."

"Did—did you see it in its box, Moppits?" asked Anna, as she handed him back the cup.

"Aye."

Tears filled Anna's eyes. "I wanted that kid, Moppits, I wanted it! Is he to take everything from me?"

Luke bent over her, straightened her pillow, made her lie down, drew the tumbled blankets smoothly round her. "You're tired," he said. "You go to sleep. I'll fix up them new acts."

Anna took his hand for a moment, sighed, let it go, and said, "Your hands is that tender, Moppits, like a woman's hands."

"Some clumsy cow she'd be, then," said Luke, with a catch in his voice.

"No—not clumsy." Anna shut her eyes, opened them and looked up dreamily to see Luke still watching her.

"Moppits," she said. "Don't go a minute. I want to tell you something. Once I thought you wasn't beautiful, but I've

changed me mind. For the beauty of a man is different from the beauty of an animal—I've only just found that out, Moppits! The beauty of an animal is good to look on, but there's a beauty that goes beyond looking, and that's a better kind."

"There's some folk have both kinds," answered Luke gently, "and that's the best of all."



## X I

" I WISH to God she'd leave him," said Luke to Marta.

" She won't, lad."

" He's nought but a drag," said Luke impatiently.

" He's her man," answered Marta. "'T wouldn't be proper she should leave him. You'd think the wuss of her for it."

Luke gazed thoughtfully at Marta. " Should I? I don't know."

" Then you did ought to know. But if you and she hadn't been a couple of fools, years back——"

" Oh no, Gran'an," said Luke quickly. " There was Elsie."

" Aye, there was Elsie," said Marta grimly. " And there's Leone. A-settin' there in the best seats dead to all decency. Not but what he's better in the seats than in the ring. But when it comes to fallin' over the flatty in front of him and havin' to be carried out——"

Since the night when he had dropped Anna from the trapeze Leone did no work in the ring. He had become merely a parasite, fed, housed, clothed, and kept by Anna. A lordly and ill-humoured parasite, forever grumbling, forever finding fault, " keeping his end up," as Marta said, " by talking big and doing nowt." An expensive, useless, wasteful parasite, whom Luke despised, but whom Anna, most unreasonably, it seemed to Luke, still loved and cherished and quarrelled with.

" He ain't doing us no good," said Luke gloomily. " Bevy omeys is bad enough when they gets in by accident, but we has to carry one round with us where ever we go."

" You're getting on fine, whether or no," said Marta. " There's many as don't."

It was true, they were getting on, and they continued to get on. By the summer of 1924, three years after Luke and Anna had joined forces, they found themselves in a very fair way of business. They had a new big-top, with two king poles instead of one, and a seating capacity of fifteen hundred. They were able to pay an advance agent, and to hire artistes. They had a name for

good work and honest dealing. Ashbourne's and Leone's never scarpeered without paying for their tobers, never kept their artistes in arrears of wages, never owed for fodder, never ran up bills they could not meet. They cut their coat according to their cloth, but the cloth was increasing in measure. They were showing two young elephants this season. True, the elephants were only hired, but Luke hoped in another year or two to be able to purchase them. They made a taking act with Twinkles and the six children.

Those children! They improved with every year, and they were all of them beautiful to look on, proud of carriage, graceful of limb, independent and fearless. They were billed as the six Leone's, and Luke, though perhaps still in his heart fondest of Lucia and Janos, felt less and less that there was any distinction between them. They were all of them the stuff out of which artistes are made, artistes fit for Castelli's Circus.

No, he had not forgotten Castelli's Circus, but year after year it seemed to him that the time for launching that great creation upon the world had not yet arrived. He was waiting for something, he scarcely knew what, something better, something bigger. Perhaps Castelli's had been a dream for so long that he could not now bring himself to reduce its dream-magnificence to the modest proportions of reality, even of a reality that might aspire, in time, to emulate the dream. At any rate he was still Luke Ashbourne, and the little circus with its gaily painted wagons, its new big-top, its growing troupe of horses, its lions, elephants, dogs, monkeys and willing artistes, despite its obviously increasing prosperity, still travelled under the name of Ashbourne's and Leone's.

In this little travelling world, so bright with promise, so rich with the possibilities of growth, there was still one blight, impossible, it seemed to remove or remedy—the presence of Leone. Luke had never forgiven Leone for what he had done to Anna; when he thought of Anna's suffering and her grief over that dead baby, it still, after three years, made him tremble with anger. Best not to think of it, it was only waste of time, accept Leone as an inevitable evil and get on with the job. Work, work, work, perfect yourself, perfect the children, watch every detail, be ever careful but never over-anxious, hold your ideal as high as ever

you have held it, keep your vision, in all its splendour, unsullied by time or accident, or success, or failure, remember that it is "all wrote down somewhere" and see to it that you fulfil your destiny. Avoid drink, avoid women, except when the need is urgent and irresistible, and at such times have done with it as quickly as you can, do not look back with regret, but acknowledge manfully that it has been largely your own stupidity that has brought you to the pass of substituting lust for love. And if there is growing in your heart a love that can have no recompense, save the recompense of serving, acknowledge that too, be grateful for it, and guard it as your best possession.

Also, if at times depression creeps over you because of things that have gone awry, remember that what a man, with his whole heart, demands of destiny, that he receives, and neither more nor less.

That winter they leased two or three fields in Hertfordshire, grouped the living wagons and beast cages in a sheltered spot, convenient to the road, and turned the horses loose. The children attended the village school, all except Lucia, who had now attained an age when such unpleasant discipline was not deemed necessary. None of the children like going to school, but Luke and Anna agreed that it would be useful for them to be able to read and write; moreover, as long as they remained in one spot, it was impossible, nowadays, to evade the importunities of the school officer. So, willy, nilly, the children must go. "You can practise Saturdays and Sundays," said Anna, when five shrill voices raised a clamour of protest at the senselessness of thus wasting their time.

Luke was away, off and on, for much of the winter, whenever he could get work, and then Anna and Lucia must see to the feeding of the seven lions. Leone considered it beneath his dignity to handle what he described as "stinking horse flesh," and, for economy's sake, Anna had dismissed all of the company, except Twinkles, whose small stature prevented him from being of much help when it came to thrusting in great joints of raw meat on the end of feeding forks. But Twinkles did what he could, he sharpened the long cook's knife and dismembered the joints for them; he also, perched on the ageing Dolly, accompanied Lucia to the knackers, when she rode over for the weekly supply of meat.

Not that Lucia did not feel capable of dealing with this business alone, dear me no, but Twinkles, who for years had assumed to himself the rôle of head-nurse to all the children, considered it more seemly that she should have an escort.

"She's too pretty to go about alone among rough men," said Twinkles to Anna, "maybe she is able to take care of herself, but you never know. For the world is the world, you can't get away from it, missus."

So Twinkles straddled his little legs across Dolly's round back and trotted behind Lucia, like any page of olden days behind his proud young mistress.

In February, Luke came back from a month's work in London, and announced that he had purchased a mate for Stripes, who now, striped no longer, shook his tawny mane, and snarled tremendously over his joints of horse flesh, and challenged each succeeding dawn with the royal roar of a full grown lion.

Since it was Saturday, all the children rode with Luke to the nearest railway station to bring home the new lioness. When they reached the siding where her travelling wagon had been dumped, Luke let down the wooden front of the cage, and they all crowded to the bars. But the lioness fled to the back of the cage and crouched, snarling at them.

"She's nervous," Luke explained. "Aye, she's been worked a bit, but by bad hands. She'll come all right, Stripes and Venus'll help gentle her."

"We'll call her Stars, shall us, Dad," said Lucia, "to go with Stripes?"

"She's a beauty!" cried the children. "She's a real beauty is our new cat!" But the lioness snarled and cowered, and Luke boarded her up again. They brought her home in triumphal procession, six horses drawing the wagon, Janos and Ham riding the two leaders, Lucia pacing alongside on the seventh horse, and the rest of them trooping ahead with Luke.

"And you think you're going to work *that*!" said Leone scornfully, when Stars' cage had been drawn up next to Stripes', and the boards once more taken down, and Stars glowered out of terrified yellow eyes into the world of wagons and friendly faces she was henceforth to inhabit.

"In a week," said Luke, "I'll have her eating out of my hand."

"In one week," said Leone, who, perhaps more than anything else, resented Luke's success as a lion-tamer, "in one week she will have finished you off—hand and all."

"If that's me fate," answered Luke, "then that's me fate. But I'll lay me life it ain't."

"You're life!" said Leone viciously. "One short week, and where is your life?" He made a movement with his fingers in the air, as if catching and crushing an invisible butterfly. "Gone!" he said. "Like so!"

Luke laughed. "Clear away, everybody, and leave her to me!"

Poor Stars, she was not vicious, only terrified of man because man had mishandled her. In two hours, Luke, working on the methods of Checko, had succeeded in getting inside the cage and standing there quietly for a few moments, whilst she snarled and eyed him. Then she flew at him, only to find herself crunching in bewilderment on the legs of a wooden chair, with Luke outside the cage cajoling her and offering her tit-bits of meat on the end of a stick. In two days she knew her name and came to the bars of the cage to have her head scratched, on the third day Luke sat in the cage with her for an hour, and she offered no more protest than an occasional yawn of boredom.

"Now we'll have her in the arena," said Luke; and he and Anna and Lucia and Sandro put up the steel cage, and Twinkles stood tiptoe and leaped like a performing dog in his efforts to help with bolts above his reach.

"If me legs would but grow equal to me ambitions, I'd be tall enough," said Twinkles good-humouredly, as he tried to swarm up one of the bars of the cage. "But then, if these here legs had growth in them I'd be no cop in the ring. Me legs is me fortune, when all's said—and small as me fortune is it's too stout to manage these bars," said Twinkles, as he slid to earth again, and turned head over heels on the grass.

Janos and Ham pounced on him. They were rolling over, all three together now, with yelps of laughter. "And who do you think you two giants is a-smothering of?" asked Twinkles, as he sat up panting.

That day, with the aid of a trail of meat, Luke taught Stars to leap on and off her pedestal; next day she both knew her own pedestal from the seven others, and remained docilely on it whilst Luke cracked a whip and blew a trumpet to get her used to the noises she must hear in the ring.

Another day, and Luke said, "We'll work her with the rest, to-morrow."

So Stars was introduced to Stripes, and to Venus and Boadicea and Gwendoline and Pocohontas and Vulcan and Jupiter, and she behaved towards her new comrades with meekness and docility, and the practice went without a hitch, and when it was over Luke rewarded his pupils and sent them all back to their cages.

"The week is not yet ended," said Leone.

"But she eats out of my hand," said Luke, and he held a piece of meat high against the bars, and Stars reared herself on her hind legs, stretched her long elegant body and grasped the meat between her claws.

"A cat has five jaws," said Leone, "and a man has but one head."

"Shall I go in the cage with you, to-morrow?" asked Lucia.

"No," answered Luke. "Not yet."

"You see," said Leone, "you see, he is afraid."

"My Dad is afraid of nothing!" cried Lucia, rounding on him. "But you are afraid of your own shadow!"

"Listen to the little big lion-tamer!" said Leone. "Tchs!" he made an ugly sound with his lips and moved away.

"The bloody old bastard!" cried Lucia angrily.

"Nay, Lucia," said Luke. "Leone is Anna's husband."

"What she marry him for?" cried Lucia.

"He was beautiful once," answered Luke thoughtfully, "and cleverer than most."

Friday morning. The sun sparkling on the wet winter growths in the hedgerow. Here and there a fiery drop of dew still burning on the end of a grass blade, here and there a daisy holding up its crown of petals. A mistle thrush singing in a leafless elm tree. The children shut up in a cheerless school-room with others who were not their kind, thinking of to-morrow when they would be free to ride and go through their tricks with Luke, drawing

their inky fingers through their unruly hair, and paying no heed at all to their smudged copy-books. Anna was in the wagon preparing their dinner, Twinkles running on his little legs to the village for cabbages, Lucia off to a neighbouring farm for milk, old Marta sitting on her wagon steps in the sun, twiddling her thumbs and meditatively turning her thoughts back through all the crowded years of her long, long, life.

Back to her childhood went Marta's thoughts, back to Castelli's Circus when her autocratic dandy of a brother first buckled her into the mechanic and watched her frantic efforts to keep her feet on a cantering horse: back to her triumphs in that same circus, when she and Marcellin of the green plume careered, the admired of all beholders, round the ring: on to the early days of her marriage, living again through the ardours and disappointments of that perplexing time, on to the birth of her son, her pride in him, his beauty and his talent and his death: on through the years, fighting again her stalwart battles against poverty and approaching age. . . . Backwards and forwards through the long years of her life went Marta's memory: again she lived with old Lucio on the melancholy moorland farm, again she stood by his grave and chuckled as the parson sneezed, and from across the grave she saw the child Luke's solemn eyes regarding her. Aye, he had recognized that they belonged to one another, that little fellow in the badly fitting black serge. Marta could see him now, moving round the grave and quietly putting his hand in hers, could feel now on her wrinkled hand the touch of those small cold fingers, which, of a truth, it seemed to her that from that day she had never let go. So many thronging memories of her own life and of Luke's life, and now, with her own life near its close, and the story of Luke's life already half unfolded, there came Lucia and little Janos to take up the tale. And so it would go on. . . .

"Life's a funny old caper," thought Marta, "but caper or no, I don't regret not one hour of it. Aye, Marta Castelli, you've had your day and you've done your best, and now 'tis the turn of the young 'uns. Not but what there's strength in the old body, yet," thought Marta with a chuckle.

A good body, it had served her well, Marta, as she sat in the sun and twiddled her thumbs, felt grateful to it.

Luke was in the steel arena practising his "cats." Leone, after quarrelling with Anna, and being turned out of the wagon, was prowling along the hedge and feeling in his waistcoat pocket for the stump of a cigar that should be there, and wasn't.

There was nothing in the pocket but a small mirror in a leather case. Leone sat down on a tree stump, took the mirror out of its case, and began idly examining a pimple on his unshaven chin.

"Cattivo!" said Leone, gazing at the reflection in the mirror, and tenderly feeling the pimple, which indeed, red and angry, might be more properly described as an incipient boil.

"I will not have it," muttered Leone, as the merciless sun lit up for him the little tragedy that was himself. Not so long ago, when Leone used that mirror to make up his face before ascending, agile as if his feet were winged, into the dome for the flying trapeze act, the mirror, clear in the lamplight, had revealed to his complacent eyes the face of a very Apollo. Now, in the merciless sunlight, it exposed to him a face that was purple-veined, blotchy, fat, unwholesome, gone to seed.

"*Molto cattivo*," said Leone, turning the mirror this way and that, as if in the vain hope of obtaining a more flattering view of himself. The sun, focused on the mirror, flashed its light into Leone's eyes, so that he blinked and, for a moment, saw nothing, not even the incipient boil that so much vexed his vanity.

Then he looked away from the mirror to the arena, where Luke, stepping with such speed and grace that he seemed almost to be dancing, was putting the big cats through their tricks.

"Vulcan!" Luke bent a little on one knee and extended his whip. The big, black-maned lion loped off his pedestal and jumped backwards and forwards over the whip.

"Seats Vulcan! Jupiter!" Luke advanced towards Jupiter and held up a hand. Jupiter reared on his pedestal, pawed the air and "talked" to Luke.

"Stripes!" Stripes loped off his pedestal and boxed with Luke.

Meantime, those lions who were not performing sat gazing far, far out into the distance as if they saw, away beyond those confining bars, away beyond the horizon of the world, illimitable



spaces, jungle trees rising against the burning suns of night, and light-footed cautious beasts treading on dainty hoofs the path to the drinking pool.

Stars gazed with the rest. Then, suddenly, her vision shifted, she pricked her ears, and stared, with head thrust forward in the direction of Leone. Leone laughed quietly as he turned his mirror to the sun. "So you have spotted my plaything?" he said softly. "Now we will have a little act that has not been rehearsed. In one week, I said, and so I think, Signor Lion-Trainer. What do you make of this? Stars pray-sents for the first time in any country. . . ."

Luke's back was to Leone. Whilst seven cats sat dreaming their dreams of illimitable spaces, and the eighth pricked her ears and glared with increasing nervousness in the direction of Leone, Luke, with brisk movements, was arranging the tiered stand on which, at his signal, the cats were to arrange themselves in pyramid shape, with himself placed in front of them and Stripes resting his heavy paws amiably on his master's shoulders, and his great head between his master's uplifted arms.

At the farm, which stood on a hill on the other side of the road, Lucia had just paid for the milk. She wished the woman would make haste with the change! She glanced back over her shoulder, looking down at the field with the cluster of wagons, the horses wandering about, the steel arena with her dad practising the cats. She loved to watch her dad in the cage with the cats—she must run, or the practice would be over. She could see the cats so plainly, sitting in a flattened semi-circle on their pedestals, with Venus at one end and Stars at the other. What was that? Something white moving across Stars' forehead. A light, a funny unaccountable light, dancing and disappearing, dancing and disappearing! How was that happening? Stars wouldn't like it! Did her dad see it?

"I'll have the change to-morrow," shouted Lucia, and began to run down the path from the farm to the road.

In the wagon Anna was mixing a pudding: currants and raisins, spice, flour and suet, the "plummy" pudding the children liked so much. She must hurry, or it wouldn't be boiled in time for their dinner. Marta looked in and asked if she could

"do aught." Anna sent her out into the sun again. Dear old soul, she had done enough in *her* lifetime.

Under the hedge Leone turned his mirror. He was being very cunning. When Luke's eyes were on Stars, the mirror was closed in Leone's palm. When Luke's eyes were elsewhere, the mirror was dancing a light across Stars' nose and forehead.

Inside the steel cage Luke had his tiered stand almost complete, when he heard Stars give a snarling roar. As he looked up sharply, she leaped off her pedestal, her tail lashing, her ears flat.

"Seats, Stars . . . *Seats*, SEATS!"

Stars slunk round behind the other lions. Jupiter turned his head and grumbled as she passed, Gwendoline yawned, the rest took no notice. Lions are lazy beasts, it was pleasant just to sit still and dream. Stars was still snarling, but she wasn't looking at Luke, she was glaring out into the field as if she saw a ghost. Luke couldn't make her out. Everything was quiet, everything normal, there was no sound or movement that could have alarmed her.

"Seats Stars! Good girl, Seats!"

Keeping in front of the semi-circle of seated lions, Luke urged her back from pedestal to pedestal, she dodging, crouching, snarling, he coaxing. He rapped the empty pedestal briskly with his whip handle. "Seats, Stars!"

He got her up at last, but he felt anxious. Perhaps she had indigestion, or toothache, or an ingrowing claw? But she looked splendid, and certainly she was not limping. Keeping a sharp watch on her, Luke completed the arrangement of his stand. Then he began calling the lions to their places.

"Vulcan!"

The big black-maned lion, as if wakened from sleep, dropped obediently from his pedestal and took his position on the top of the stand.

"Jupiter!" And like a dog Jupiter padded over to join Vulcan.

"Boadi——"

There was a loud roar, Luke saw Stars leap wildly backwards on to the grass, saw her, as it seemed, strike at some imaginary foe as she landed, saw her tail lashing, her eyes glaring wildly,

her mouth opened in snarl after snarl, as she backed away, fighting as if with a shadow, behind the other cats.

Impossible, now, to get her to her seat again, she seemed possessed of some kind of hysteria; mustn't give in to her though, must finish the act, must behave as if nothing were amiss, or he would lose control of the lot. Calmly and without haste he called the rest to their places, and, to his surprise, saw Stars bound from behind the pedestals and leap to her place amongst them, either from habit, or because she felt there was safety in numbers.

Good! All in order for the tableau. Turning to front the same way as his grouped lions, Luke bowed to an imaginary audience. Then he lifted up his arms and tilted back his face. "Now Stripes!"

Seated below Jupiter and Vulcan, Stripes shifted his heavy paws. Stripes liked this trick; when his head rested between Luke's arms, he would sometimes put out his rough tongue and lick Luke's hair. The hair dragging over his tongue amused Stripes, it had an interesting smell, too. Stripes thrust forward his great head.

The great head never reached Luke's arms. As Luke tilted his face a bright flicker of light darted down over Stars' nose and on to Luke's eyes. At the same moment Stars sprang upon him and fastened her claws in his scalp, and he went down under the weight of her body.

He was calling their names, he was half-blinded with blood, he was being dragged about the cage, the whole place was in pandemonium, lions roaring, lions fighting, lions on top of him, lions all round him. Calling their names, pushing them off, battling against them, with almost superhuman strength he staggered to his feet; Stars had her teeth in his shoulder, her claws tore at his chest and back; through the blood that poured across his eyes he saw Stripes and Vulcan rolling over and over in pitched battle, saw Jupiter leaping on Venus, saw Boadicea and Gwendoline tearing at one another's throats. "Seats! Seats!" Pocohontas alone obeyed him, she leaped to her pedestal. But if one hears, perhaps the others—"Seats Venus! Seats Stripes! . . . Across the field he heard Lucia shouting, heard the cage door rattle, someone coming in, "Keep out there! Seats Stripes! Seats Jupiter!" and all the time scarcely conscious of the teeth

and claws of Stars that tore at his flesh, "Seats! Seats!" Stripes would obey but Jupiter will not let him, Jupiter bounds once more upon Stripes, the two of them fall upon Luke, Luke goes down again and sees, beyond his reddened hands that are battling against Stars' jaws, the heroic figure of old Marta plunging a feeding fork with all her force into Stars' shoulder. With a roar Stars let go her hold of Luke and turned on Marta. "Come on an' welcome!" screamed Marta with a yell of laughter.

The yell was broken off short as Stars seized Marta in her jaws and shook her like a rag, Luke was on his feet, Anna was in the cage, firing blank cartridges into Stars face, Lucia was in the cage, brandishing a chair, opening the door that led to the runway, driving Stripes and Jupiter up it to continue their battle in the shute. Stars had dropped Marta and was backing away in front of Anna. Luke seized the revolver from Anna, Anna dragged Marta out of the cage, Luke with the blank cartridges, Lucia with the chair, drove the rest of the animals into the runway and up the runway and into their cages. Then, followed by a trail of blood, Luke staggered out of the arena and dropped senseless.

Leone picked himself up from against the tree trunk where Lucia had sent him spinning as she jumped the hedge. The child had struck the mirror out of his hand, she had also spilled milk all over him, and caused him to bruise his cheek against the tree. A nasty, vicious child.

Wiping the milk from his coat, Leone strolled over to the group outside the steel cage. Marta lay in a deep red pool—who would think that skinny old body would have held so much rich red blood? Leone could not see the old woman's face, it was covered by Lucia's coat, but he could see, sticking out from under the coat, something that had once been a hand, and that was quite enough. Leone felt a little sick, he turned to Anna and Lucia who were kneeling over Luke, washing his wounds with water from a bucket (water ominously stained) and bandaging them with strips torn from Anna's apron. Augh-ha, augh-ha, augh-ha, Lucia was sobbing. What an ugly noise the child made!

"The old woman is dead," said Leone. "And *he* will die

soon. I warned him that it would happen. Though I do not know how it happened."

"Oh!" screamed Lucia. "It was you what did it! I saw you flash the mirror in Stars' eyes!"

Anna gave him just one look. "Get out of my sight," she said in a low voice. "By God, if I ever set eyes on you again I'll put a knife atween your ribs!" Then she spoke sharply to Lucia. "Don't waste time screaming at him, help me lift your dad, then catch a prad and fetch a doctor. Stop snivelling child, I've seen worse wounds than these. Your dad ain't goin' to die."

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## X I I

LUKE was in hospital for six months. At first he lay in a fever during which he fought continually with monstrous foul-breathed shapes that were lions, yet not lions. The shapes filled the room in which he lay, they filled the universe, and sometimes amongst them he was aware of Leone's huge and distorted face smiling down at him from within an inch of his eyes. And Leone's lips would move, and a thin, far-away voice go echoing amongst the shapes. "In one week. The week is not yet ended," said the echoing voice, and then wild laughter fell from the ceiling and the fight with the monstrous, foul-breathed shapes would begin again.

But when Anna came and sat by Luke's bed, the shapes vanished.

"What?" he asked her one day, looking at her with perplexed eyes. There was a question he wanted her to answer, but she did not answer it, because he could not remember what the question was. The question floated before his mind and floated away again, as thoughts do on the incoming tide of sleep; he strove to grasp it, and sometimes he nearly succeeded and then she left him, and the shapes returned and tore the question to pieces.

But after many days there was Anna, clear to see, sitting by the bed, and there was the question distinct in his mind.

"Marta?" he asked.

When Anna had told him, Luke turned his face from her and lay without speaking for so long that at last Anna said gently:

"Nay, nay, Moppits, it happened as she would have wished. She died to save you."

And Luke answered bitterly: "First she gave me her money, and the war took it. Then she gave me her life—And I repaid her in no way at all."

"Your life," Anna reminded him. "That is her payment, Moppits."

"My life!" echoed Luke. "Oh Christ!"

"We gave her a fine funeral," said Anna. "They all came. Tommy and Roxy and Matthew, Dolf, Norman, Cyrus, Edwina and Phemy and Flora and Sarah and Helena, and the boys and girls—oh the whole lot. And we buried her gay, as she would have liked, with a band playin' round her grave. Don't fret over her, Moppits, I think she may be glad to rest."

"I can't see her restin', somehow," said Luke with a sigh.

"Well then, she can break in God's prads for Him and learn the cherubs' flip-flaps," said Anna, laughing and wiping the tears from her eyes. "For it don't all end here, I reckon."

"No," said Luke slowly, "I reckon it can't."

Another day he asked her about Leone.

"I sent him packing," said Anna, and would tell him no more, but changed the subject and said she had loaned the lions to Cyrus. "He knows a chap to work 'em," she explained, "and we can have 'em back next season, or sell 'em, as we wish."

"You'll start out this season without me?" asked Luke.

"I don't want, but I guess I'll have to," answered Anna.

"And Lucia and Janos of course'll travel with us."

Lucia and Janos came to say good-bye to Luke. They gazed at him as if he were something very precious and very breakable, and could not say a word because they had been warned not to say too much. Their solemn faces made Luke laugh, and when he laughed, Janos laughed. But Lucia put her head on the pillow and sobbed, for the doctor had said he would have to take off her dad's arm, and he hadn't taken it off, and, what with the pity of it and the relief, it was all too much for Lucia. But, when she had done sobbing, they were very happy and companionable.

After the circus set out, Anna wrote frequently to Luke, and he was able to follow the progress of Ashbourne's and Leone's up through Wales and into the Lake District. "Business not too bad," Anna would report, or, "Everything O.K." or "Good weather and doing splendid." She had Miss Priscilla with her again, and some of her cousins—a son and a daughter of Euphemia's and one of Norman's boys—and also Bobby and Billy Gough, who had given up riding, but who made a capital pair of comedy acrobats and clowns, and who, adoring Anna,

and thinking her the most wonderful young woman in the world, looked after her interests in every possible way.

The letters that Anna wrote to Luke were very short, she had too much on her hands to be able to sit down and write long letters; but, short as they were, they now and then flashed out into a vivid phrase that brought the whole life of Ashbourne's and Leone's crowding before Luke's eyes.

"The prads got out last night, all but Dazzler," (the entire) "who couldn't break his tether. The men had a job to find them. It was Dazzler calling like a bell through the dark that warned us they was gone. He called all night till they were rounded up at dawn. . . ."

There it all was: the quiet tober, the packed lorries, the wagons and tents in darkness, every one sleeping. The prads moving here and there, cropping the grass; one—Pixy, maybe, she was a rogue—finding a negotiable gap in the hedge; or perhaps one of the hands, returning late and merry from a date with a dona had left the gate open. Pixy stepping out into the road, the rest of the prads following, the soft amble of their feet moving away to some common or waste land from which the night wind blew sweetly. Dazzler kicking at his tether, mad to follow them, then his high neigh calling "like a bell through the dark." Calling, calling! Lights moving in wagons and tents, Anna in her thick dressing gown on the steps of her wagon, drowsy men stumbling out with lanterns, the lanterns bobbing away in this direction and that, Anna going back to bed, lying awake, listening to Dazzler's high neigh, repeated and repeated, and the thud of his hoofs as he ran in circles on the end of his tether. Then, at dawn, the brisk clatter of returning horses, the shouts of the men on their backs, the cavalcade—piebald, skewbald, black, white, chestnut, roan, and "flea-bitten"—entering the field, Anna again at the top of the steps, looking out this time on a world that was drenched in dew. "Have you got 'em all?" Anna would shout, and someone would answer, "Every bloody one of 'em, missus." And the men would slide to the ground, and there would be the prads quietly grazing again, and Dazzler whinnying softly at the end of his tether.

Oh dear, how Luke ached to be with them, how he looked forward to Anna's letters! And in answer he had so little to tell



her, only that he was "getting on nice," or that the nights were durn hot, or that he had walked with the help of a stick in the hospital garden. Something else he yearned to tell her, but he must not. Or might he? She had sent Leone packing. Well then, why should he not tell her?

"I'll wait till I can speak to her," thought Luke, "for letters is awkward."

And early in September, feeling like a man released from prison, he took train and joined Anna at Windermere.

He arrived late on Saturday night. On Sunday, after dinner, Anna and Luke and all the children strolled down to the lake. It was a brilliant day, the lake was a blue mirror reflecting the soft steep green of the hills; a smart little steamer, packed with holiday makers, left the jetty and fussed its way up the lake, snatching away the placid reflections into the restless, multi-coloured coils of its moving wake. The children stripped and went swimming. Anna and Luke sat on the bank, watching, and admiring their clean limbs and their prowess. They were capital little swimmers.

"Six of 'em," said Luke, "and only one of 'em truly mine. Yet it makes no odds to me. They're all *our* children."

"Yes," said Anna thoughtfully, "I feel that way too."

"Heard from Leone?" asked Luke after a pause.

"No."

"Would you take him back, should he ask?"

"That I wouldn't."

"Anna——"

"Aye, Moppits?"

"I've been wantin' to tell you all summer. I've been—thinking of you all summer. I—I love you more than my life, Anna."

"Is that so, dear Moppits?"

"Aye, it is so. Need it make any difference, Anna, that we can't—can't get wedded in a church?"

"You're reckoning that I feel the same as you," said Anna, with a little laugh.

"I hoped—you did," answered Luke.

Chin on hand, Anna meditated. "I'm like a prad behind a fence, Moppits," she said at last. "With you on t'other side."

"*What* fence?"

"You know, Moppits."

"'Tis a fancy fence, then," said Luke urgently. "'Tis a fancy fence, I tell you, Anna, and no real one!"

"So long as it seems real to me," answered Anna, "I can't leap over it. Don't say no more, please, Moppits."

"Not even that we're still young and that—and that there's little circus artistes cryin' out to be born?"

"No Moppits," said Anna tenderly. "Not even that."

They were silent. Then:

"I reckon you're right," said Luke. "I take it that you must be."

Being Anna, she was right, and being Luke, he would say no more. And yet, could he have been mistaken when, so often, as he had lain in bed in the hospital thinking of Anna, it had seemed to him that destiny had turned over the leaves of the book where it was "all wrote down" and shown him a glowing page?

"And the day came when Luke said of Anna, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. And Anna conceived and brought forth sons and daughters for Castelli's Circus. Now these are the generations of Lucio Castelli . . ."

Yes, he must have been mistaken. It was not the hand of destiny that had shown him this page; that he had seen it at all was but a sick man's fancy; a sick man dreaming himself back into childhood, when he sat in a dreary schoolroom, only half-hearing the dreary words of a Bible lesson that had no application to himself. And yet—what a man, with his whole heart, demands of destiny that he receives. Right. But a man who is in love can, with his whole heart, demand nothing but that the will of the beloved shall be acceptable to him.

Luke began to talk quietly of business. Ashbourne's and Leone's had done well that season, hadn't it? Yes, indeed it had, Anna assured him. He should go through the books that night and see how well they were doing.

"I've been thinking," said Luke, "that next year we might venture a bit of a splash. Remember that gajo I told you of—the one what offered to invest money? I reckon I'll write him. He's a funny old sort, but he's straight."

A few days later, when they were at Carlisle, a Mr. Joshua Garrick called to see Luke and Anna. Mr. Garrick was short and

stout, he wore riding breeches and shining brown leggings, though he had never sat a horse in his life, having been engaged, from his youth upwards, in the exacting business of accumulating money.

"You see," said Mr. Garrick, gazing at Anna out of brown eyes which, though heavily pouched and somewhat bilious-looking, were nevertheless oddly childlike in expression. "You see I never had any fun in my life. My people were Quakers, and they didn't go in for fun, only for godliness and business. I never saw inside a circus when I was a boy, though I used to peep from the schoolroom at the parades going through the town, and it all—the life of such people as you—seemed to me like some divine romance. So now, in my old age," said Mr. Garrick, "when I have money to spare—a thousand pound, two thousand pounds, three——"

"Go easy," said Luke. "Ashbourne's and Leone's only borrows what it can repay."

Mr. Garrick fingered the black stock round his throat; the stock was fastened by a gold pin that had a horse's head on it. Dangling from Mr. Garrick's waistcoat was a white ivory fob, shaped into the likeness of a dog with collar and buckle. The ring on Mr. Garrick's chubby right hand carried a device of a gold lion rampant, with ruby eyes; the ebony walking stick between Mr. Garrick's knees terminated in an elephant's head.

"Maybe he's crackers," thought Anna uncomfortably.

But Mr. Garrick was not crackers, only circus-struck and anxious for an interest that had nothing to do with the business out of which he had made his fortune—an innocent enough business, the manufacture of boiled sweets. Garrick's Pure Boiled Sweets, Garrick's Pure Barley Sugar, Garrick's Pure Mixed Fruit Drops, Garrick's Pure Acid Drops—Mr. Garrick was sick of the sight of them, of the very mention of them, though he had travelled up to Carlisle bringing a case full of them for the circus children. Mr. Garrick was a bachelor and a sentimentalist, and it was the sight of those clever children in the ring (whose free and healthy and altogether enviable lot contrasted so piquantly with his own restricted upbringing) that had inspired him to offer his patronage to Ashbourne's and Leone's rather than to any other circus. The children first, and later something

about Luke. Mr. Garrick had tried to define what this "something" was, and had given it up. It was just "something."

"We'll take a thousand for a start, then," said Luke, "at five per cent. And later perhaps, if we prosper, we'll talk about increasing the loan—eh, Anna?"

"Aye, Moppits. Though when we're prospering that much, we shan't need no more loan."

"I don't know," said Luke, as a vision of the glories of Castelli's Circus swung giddily close. "There's prospering *and* prospering."

"To be sure," answered Mr. Garrick, "once you begin you go on, you know. And now," he stood up, fingered his stock and beamed at Luke and Anna, "would it bore you *very* much to take me round the show? This life of yours," explained Mr. Garrick apologetically, "is still . . ." He coughed, he had nearly said, "A divine romance to me." He coughed and blushed.

With a touching faith in the essential goodness of man's nature (which, as a business man he ought long ago to have dispensed with) Mr. Garrick told Luke that he didn't want any nonsense about signing an agreement. "As men, we trust one another," he said.

So they did, but trust was personal and business impersonal, and this loan was a matter which might involve many other people besides their two selves. Luke insisted that their dealings should be placed on a legal footing.

"Very well," agreed Mr. Garrick, rather wistfully.

### XIII

THE next winter was a busy one for Luke. They took up their quarters in Norfolk. There they were able to rent, for a moderate sum, the empty stables and fields of that very same riding school where Luke had for a short time worked as groom. Riding was going out, motoring was coming in, the proprietor of the school had sold up, and was glad to get what he could for the rent of the premises.

Luke bought a second-hand car, sufficiently powerful to draw a living wagon, for though he much preferred driving horses, he remembered Sam Beckett's motto, "them as don't go for'ard goes back," and he meant to keep abreast of the times. In this car, during the winter, he made many journeys, both to London and the larger provincial towns, and on his journeys he was always accompanied by Blanche, now a great, great-grandmother, retired from public life. Curled up on the back seat of the car, Blanche would lie and dream of leaping through blazing hoops and waltzing in a pink silk petticoat to the sound of clapping hands; but, let any stranger approach the car in Luke's absence, and then you would see whether a great, great-grandmother was not the equal, and more than the equal, of any perky young débutante when it came to defending the Rum-Cul's property.

Luke was getting ready for his "splash." Wherever he heard of an extra good horse for sale, or an extra good act being performed, whether on the trapeze, the high- or low-wire, the rings or on horseback, there was Luke inquiring, watching and comparing. None but the best, he would have none but the best; oh yes, he intended to spend money on advertisement, on costume, on trappings, on pomp and glitter, but first he would make sure that what he had to show was worth the advertisement, the pomp and the glitter.

He very soon discovered that the thousand pounds, which had seemed to him such a big sum of money, was not going very far. He wanted at least three elephants, and he wanted them to be his own and Anna's, not merely hired from season to season.

He wanted a troupe of white Arab liberties, some ponies, a couple more good rosin-backs. He wanted a new big-top with twice the seating capacity, he wanted new motor-drawn living wagons, and motor lorries for the properties. He was going "for'ard," the vision of Castelli's was coming nearer and nearer to solid fact.

After reconsidering the last season's takings, and closely examining his own capabilities, his experience, his knowledge, his vision, and his grasp of essentials, it seemed to him that he would be justified in approaching Mr. Garrick again.

He arranged to meet his amiable patron in Charing Cross Road at a restaurant frequented by circus folk. And there the little gentleman sat beaming round him with as much pride as some people would feel were they permitted to lunch in company with kings and princes. Mr. Garrick had purchased a grey hat with a wide, curly brim, especially for this occasion, and when a well-known clown, after looking from the hat to the elephant-headed walking stick, and from the stick to the fob, and from the fob to the tiepin, and from the tiepin to the ring, when this celebrated clown mistook him for a Rum-Cul from America and asked him how business was doing out there, Mr. Garrick's cup of happiness simply overflowed.

"I've been thinking that even if I have to pay £500 a piece for trained elephants," Luke explained, "the money'd be safe as in the Bank of England. The animals'd be insured, of course, and a healthy elephant'll always fetch her price."

"My dear old chap," said Mr. Garrick enthusiastically, "go ahead, it's all I ask."

That evening, when Luke got back to the winter quarters Anna was on the watch for him. "Guess who's come?" she cried as Luke stepped out of the car.

"Can't say I'm sure," answered Luke. How beautiful she looked, flushed and eager, her dark eyes shining with pleasure! He longed to put his arms round her and kiss her red smiling lips. Durn that fancy fence of hers!

"Who would you like to see best in all the world?" asked Anna.

"You," answered Luke promptly. "And I'm seeing you."

"Next best then."

Luke turned pale. His heart gave a jump and seemed to stop

beating. There was a name he could speak, but he dared not.

"Say, say," urged Anna, "don't be afraid!"

"Not—Otto?"

"Aye Otto!" cried Anna, "Otto! Otto!"

"Where is he?"

"In my wagon."

Luke ran, he scarcely dared believe it even now, but when he had bounded up the steps and flung open the door there was Otto, broken-nosed, blue-eyed, wide-faced, calmly smiling Otto—with as fanciful a taste in cardigans as ever—surrounded by a clamorous group of Ashbourne and Leone children.

Not only Otto, but Otto's wife as well, and Otto's baby that Lucia and Roberta were impatiently snatching from one another, and hugging and exclaiming over, much as if it were some rare species of young performing animal.

Not only Otto and Otto's wife and baby, but Frieda, who looked so happy that it seemed old Father Time had reversed his hour glass for her benefit, and was minute by minute smoothing the sad lines out of her face.

"I have come back, you see," said Otto, with both hands clasping Luke's hand.

"My God," exclaimed Luke, "and the nights and nights I've wakened from dreamin' as I'd killed you!"

Otto's story was soon told. The ship in which he had left Dartmouth had struck a mine in the Baltic. Drifting in one of the ship's boats, Otto, with several Swedish sailors, had been picked up by a German cruiser and carried to Stettin. The Swedes had been sent home, but Otto, admitting his nationality (What else to do? as he said), was put in a training camp and later sent to the Western front. It was in 1915 that he came face to face with Bert Thomas and "looked the other way." After the war, being penniless, he had attached himself to a company of strolling players, and travelled with them through Poland, Lithuania, Esthonia and finally back through the north of Germany into Denmark, where he managed to get work at the circus in Copenhagen. It was here that he met the dusky-eyed frail Sofia, of nationality and parentage unknown, earning her bread by spinning, supported by her teeth, sixty feet above the circus ring, and without, so far as Sofia knew, a relative in the world.

"She had need of someone to look after her," said Otto. "I had need of a sweetheart. We fell in love and we married. We converse as we can in words of half a dozen languages—no, she knows no English except the one word, love." (Sofia's little determined lips parted and her white teeth gleamed.) "But you begin with the one word love, and soon you learn all that is left," went on Otto. "Sofia is quick to learn. She is my top-mounter. We perfected the perch-act, we denied ourselves, we saved the passage money and *das Ende vom Liede ist*—here we are."

"For good and all?" asked Luke.

"For good and all—if you permit."

"I permit naught else," said Luke, "as long as we both live."

He asked Frieda about the poodles. Oh yes, they were flourishing, she said. Judy was dead, and poor Draggles too of course, but she had a fine little troupe, all prize buffers still, she'd seen to it that they bred true. "But I'm thinking of getting a girl to show them for me," said Frieda. "You see," she shrugged. "I am no longer an ornament."

When she said that, nobody made the mistake, as in politer circles they might have done, of assuring her that what she said was nonsense. Greying hair and wrinkling faces are not acceptable in the ring, they all knew it, so what was the sense of pretending they did not? It is only your ring-master, with his breast-plate of authority that grows more formidable with the years, or your clown with be-slabbered face and bristling wig, who can meet Time in the ring and defy him. No, they did not dismiss Frieda's problem with a mouthful of lying compliments, they did a better thing, they faced her problem squarely and helped her solve it.

Anna and Luke exchanged glances. It seemed to Luke that he and Anna had very little difficulty, nowadays, in reading each others thoughts. Anna jerked her head towards Lucia, who, with her bright hair tumbling over her face, was crouching at Roberta's feet, in order that the bright hair might be grasped and tugged in the fists of Otto's baby, who sat on Roberta's knee.

"Give him to me, give him to me, now!" urged Lucia.

"No, you greedy pig," cried Roberta passionately, "I haven't held him any, yet."



"He'll only pee on you," said Ham, who couldn't see what the girls were making so much fuss for.

"Let'n, the lovely!" cried Roberta rapturously. "Let'n pee if he wants to!"

Anna jerked her head towards Lucia. Luke nodded, and said to Frieda.

"Shall Lucia show them for you?"

"Me!" cried Lucia, leaping to her feet and forgetting her interest in the baby. "Yes, I'll show 'em for you, what are they—lions?"

"No," said Luke laughing, "poodles."

Lucia looked disappointed. Still, poodles were better than nothing. You began with poodles, perhaps, but assuredly you went on to lions.

"But I could not take Lucia from you," said Frieda.

"You wouldn't," answered Luke. "I told you once afore you know where you're welcome. Anna and me'll want a good book-keeper next season, and you always was a nob at it."

"Thank you," said Frieda. "I'll come."

Luke took Otto to his own wagon, he wanted to have him to himself for a bit, to luxuriate in the knowledge that Otto was come back "for good and all," to talk to him about so many, many things, old and new, and more especially about his plans and arrangements for the following season.

He could imagine nothing more fitting than that Otto should have arrived just when his prospects were showing so fair. *Nothing?* Yes, one thing more fitting he could imagine, but he had forbidden himself to think of that.

"Half of whatever profits we make will be Anna's," he explained, "and half will be mine. And whatever is mine, is also yours, cul."

"I do not understand," said Otto quietly, "why it should be so."

"Nor I," answered Luke with a happy laugh. "But so it is."

## X I V

THAT Christmas, Luke, Lucia, Sandro, Otto and his wife, Sofia, got work in a big short-season circus in London. Luke was showing the lions. (The man whom Cyrus had engaged to show them during the summer had proved unsatisfactory, and Cyrus was relieved to get rid both of the trainer and the animals.) Lucia and Sandro were riding, Otto and Sofia doing their perch act. Anna and Frieda remained in Norfolk to look after the grooms and the horses and the dogs and the younger children. And Twinkles remained with them, for Twinkles, though in great demand both for pantomimes and winter circuses, would never leave his nurslings.

"I wonder," said Anna, "shall I work much more?"

"*Himmel!*" exclaimed Frieda, "and you not thirty-four yet!"

"At times," said Anna, who was feeling despondent (the weather was bitter, for one thing, with showers of hail falling and an east wind drying up the blood), "at times I might be eighty-four—I seem to have lived that long." She lifted the window curtain and peered out into the driving hail. "I wonder did Moppits take his thick vests?" she said. "He's all of a sweat when he comes out of the cage."

Frieda laid a hand on Anna's. She knew well enough what it was that made Anna despondent. "Why don't you be happy with him?" she urged. "Others do it."

Anna shook her head. "I can't. I'm not made that way."

"Some people would say you are being very cruel," ventured Frieda.

"I know it," said Anna. "And I can't help it."

"If Leone were dead?" persisted Frieda.

"He isn't," cried Anna. "Oh—hold your tongue!"

Frieda said no more, but by and by Anna herself reverted to the subject, and confessed that she had been posting money to Leone ever since she sent him away. "Not much," said Anna,

"and not often, for what I do send goes all one way, and that I know. But if it were a dog, you couldn't just leave it by the roadside; and Leone, Leone——" she laid her head on her arm and wept. Then she laughed at herself for weeping. And finally she said. "How could I live with one man whilst I'm sending money to another—would that be right?"

"Some might say yes," answered Frieda.

"Do you say yes?" asked Anna sharply.

"No," answered Frieda.

"Nor me," said Anna. "For half my time I'm thinkin' of Leone, and only half my time of Moppits. And Moppits can manage well enough without me, but Leone can't."

The result of this conversation was that Anna thought so much about Leone that she wrote to him, enclosing a pound note. And the result of sending the pound note was that by return she had a letter in Leone's flourished but very shaky handwriting asking for another.

Anna did not send another, she would wait a week, and then perhaps—

"I have no work and no money," Leone had written. "I beg in the streets." He would say that, Anna reflected, whether it were true or no. But if it were true—and in this bitter weather! Last summer he had got work with Anna's uncle-in-law, Dolf. Dolf had been going through a patch of bad luck and was having to economize, but, still, for old times' sake he hadn't refused Leone. He had taken him on, out of sheer pity, as a groom. Anna imagined the once beautiful and vain and elegantly attired Leone, dressed up in some ill-fitting and greasy uniform, leading the liberties into the ring. What had he felt like, how could he bear it, he, Leone, for whom the circus tent had been merely the panoply under which he might shine in the eyes of all men, the ring never more than a setting for his own vanity, the outward extension of his personal glory?

He had not borne it; in August, Dolf had written that Leone had scarpered, and taken with him several pounds that did not belong to him.

Still, even a dog that is a thief you do not leave to die by the roadside.

"I have pawned my diamond," Leone had written in

November. "I am cramming my belly with the husks of an old love, miserable wretch that I am!"

Now it was January and, "I beg in the streets."

"But I will wait a few days," Anna decided, hardening her heart.

"If you would but come to see me," Leone had written, "you would have pity." Anna had pity, but she dared not see him, she had too much pity to risk it.

And one night, when the children were sleeping and Frieda had gone to her wagon, and Anna was patching Vador's breeches and thinking of the time when he and Sandro were babies and she had begun to quarrel with Leone over the matter of the "little glasses," and wondering if perhaps, had she been wiser and cleverer, she might not have found some way more effective than quarrelling—one night as she sat so brooding and remembering, there came a step stumbling outside, a hand fumbling at the door, and there was Leone himself standing in the wagon. He was swaying, but not with drink, he looked incredibly ill, ragged and dirty, his eyes were hollow and lustrous, the bones of his face were plainly visible behind the stretched white skin; and yet, through the dirt and sickness, something that Anna had not seen for years, a faint reflection of the beauty that had once been Leone's, glimmered and vanished and glimmered again on his face.

Anna stared at him. She was too shocked to speak.

"I have come, Anna *mia*," said Leone, smiling vaguely at her. "I have walked all the way. I have come that you may put a knife between my ribs."

He held out a shaking hand. Anna leaped up. But she did not know what she had been meaning to do or say, for at that moment he collapsed at her feet.

Luke and Lucia and Sandro and Otto and Sofia and the baby came home about a fortnight later. They were a gay party, all the way from London they had sung so loudly that the powerful but noisy engine of the car had scarcely had a look in. The baby slept in Lucia's arms, Blanche lay squeezed between Otto and Luke, the car was choc-a-bloc with themselves and their suitcases and the parcels that were presents for those who had been unfortunate enough to have to remain in Norfolk. They had

stalled no trick and they had come no busters, the show had been an immense success with everybody at the top of their form—and they were overjoyed to be coming home.

As soon as Luke got out of the car, Frieda came to him and said, "Anna wants you in the wagon—no, not the rest of you, only Moppits."

"She's—not poorly or anything?" Luke asked quickly.

"No, no," Frieda assured him. "Anna's all right."

But when he saw Anna, Luke felt for a moment that Frieda must be mistaken. Anna didn't look all right. She looked ill, and it was quite evident that she had been crying.

"Anna—what is it?"

"Leone came," said Anna. "He was very ill. He died and we have buried him. We didn't give him—a good funeral—we—No Moppits—please—don't—touch me——"

She drew back from him, but it seemed to Luke that this time he knew her will better than she did, and he put his arms round her very tenderly, and comforted her.

And next day when he asked her, almost shyly, "Is that prad still stayin' by itself behind the fence, Anna?" she answered, "No, Moppits, the prads are grazing side by side on the same tober."

"It's not on Ashbourne and Leone's show they'll be working, then," said Luke exultantly, "but on Lucio Castelli's! That's the name of *our* show, Anna! You and me is goin' to start it together."

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## X V

THE year 1926, the time five o'clock on a bright afternoon in May, the place Endcliffe Fields in a growing suburb of Whitfield in Yorkshire, where Lucio Castelli's New All Star Circus had arrived that morning.

A snug little concern is Castelli's Circus; not what you'd call an immense show, yet, but its progress up through England this spring has been one long record of full houses and enthusiastic audiences. Surely it must have appointed Fame as its advance agent, for its coming is looked forward to from town to town. No, but seriously, there is "something" about Castelli's. It is so gay, so well-appointed, so brisk, so spirited. There isn't one dud act in the whole programme. And the ring-master—that's Lucio Castelli himself, you know—what an attractive fellow with his deep, pleasant-toned voice and his elegant movements! I'll tell you something that perhaps you don't know; he belongs to Whitfield, used to be just a poor lad loafing about the streets, and it was at the Royal here, in Hessop's days, that he got his first chance of showing what he was made of. And now look at him: quite a fop, as you might say, in his shiny topper, his scarlet coat that fits without a wrinkle, and his immaculate white gloves. But all the show is immaculately dressed. That girl on the flying trapeze——

Get away with you, that's not a girl, that's Madame Castelli, that's the Boss's wife.

Well, anyhow, she looks like a girl, and she's stunning. Did you ever see a more perfect figure? You don't mean to tell me all those cute kids—the six Castelli's—that work with the dwarf—what's his name, Twinkles—you *don't* meant to tell me all those kids are hers? I can't believe it!

Perhaps not all, but some of them are, I know for a fact, because the little lad with the black curls told me he was her youngest.

Well, well, well, they're a credit to Lucio Castelli whoever

kids they are, but the whole show's a credit to him. Have you seen those natty trailers—living wagons I believe they call them—all the same colour scheme? I peeped inside one, wouldn't mind living in it myself; and the horse tent, it's a treat to go into that and see the horses having their manes combed—like silk, I tell you; and the elephants with their polished toe nails and their well-groomed hides—And have you looked at the lions? Sleek as butter! Well, all I can say is they put some of our zoos to shame, though I dare say it's easier to keep a wild beast happy on a circus than in a zoo, more exciting for them, with the constant change of scene and all that—as I often say, boredom is man's worst enemy, and the same applies to the beasts, I bet a dollar. But here I am chattering like a magpie—you'll see the lions for yourself after the interval, Lucio Castelli trained them, I believe. No he doesn't show them himself this season—too busy bossing the show. But there's a little girl goes in the cage with the trainer, I'm told, the one with the fair hair that showed the poodles. What d'you think of that, eh, for a kid not yet fifteen? Well, I must say, I like circuses, I always did, there's something so plucky about them, all risking their lives with a gay smile, oh yes, they do risk their lives, I assure you—there's lots of them get killed. Let's have a look at the programme half a second. A bit hard these two-and-fourpenny seats, aren't they? . . .

In the three-and-sixpenny seats a handsome, rather discontented-looking young woman in a fur coat sat silent, watching the performance. She was by herself and, though she knew the man who sat on her right hand, she was not in a conversational mood. She had greeted the man, of course, when she first came in, "Hullo, John, fancy seeing you here! Quite an event, isn't it?"

And John, whom she used to know well, had introduced her to his wife, and to his boy and girl. "Meet the wife . . . This is Elsie Wainwright, dear" (and then, in a whisper, "You know, Luke's former—"), and this is Jack, Elsie, and this is Lilian."

Rabbity-mouthed young things, Elsie considered them, but what else could you expect of John? Heavens! That must be Lucia just come in for her riding act, Lucia with a silver star in her hair, and a silver dress like—"like dew with the sun on it."

"Like dew with the sun on it"—where had she heard those words? Oh, she remembered now, it was Luke, long ago; Luke, when he was nine years old, had said those words to Elsie when she was ten, promising her that she should be his circus queen. How queer it made her feel to remember that . . . But she didn't want to look at Lucia; it hurt, somehow.

She was a fool to have come, she felt like crying. Luke had stolen Lucia from her, and now she had no children. Not that she wanted any, little nuisances, and Bertie didn't want any either, but, but—Lucia was so lovely. Yes, it was her loveliness and her youth that hurt. It made you realize that you were thirty-nine, though you always said you were only thirty, but whatever you *said*, the fact remained that you would soon be middle-aged, and that you were bored with Bertie, and that life, somehow, had lost its savour.

"And is that really my cousin?" young Jack was saying to his father, John.

"Yes, Jack, what d'you think of her."

"I think she's *It*," said Jack with a sigh.

Who was it had said that Elsie would never be *It*? That intolerable Mr. Hessop! Well then, why was Lucia *It*, if Elsie never had been? It was a lie, Lucia was merely pretty, just as Elsie had been at her age, but she wasn't, no, she was *not* *It*. How could she be *It*, if Elsie had never been *It*? And she wasn't that rabbit boy's cousin, either! Elsie felt she wanted to scream at John and Mrs. John and Jack and Lilian, sitting there so complacent and talking about *It*! She got up. "It's very stuffy in here," she said to John, in her best lady-like manner. "I don't think I shall stay."

John helped her down from her seat, "You stopping with your mother, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Elsie, "she was coming with me, but—she doesn't much care about circuses."

That was not quite true. "I'd love to come," Minnie Hunt had said, "but not if there's lions. For just suppose a lion should get loose—what then, Elsie?"

Yes, what then? And Elsie had heard a rumour that Lucia was to go into the lions' cage. It shouldn't be allowed, Lucia shouldn't be allowed, circuses shouldn't be allowed, it was too,



was too—"Good-bye, John," said Elsie, holding out a daintily gloved hand. "It's been so pleasant seeing you again."

"So that's his first wife, is it?" said Mrs. John, "Well, I prefer his second. John——"

"Yes, dear?"

"Are you going to see Luke when the show's over?"

"I should like to. You know, we usen't to see eye to eye, at home, and I've lived to regret it. The war taught me a lot, Muriel."

"Ye-es?" But to Mrs John's very properly biased mind, it was doubtful whether her husband could ever have had much to learn. "John," she said longingly. "Do you think they'll give us tea in one of the caravans? I do hope they will! It would be such an experience for the children."

Mrs John was dark and pretty and vivacious, a kitten of a thing, with little white teeth that protruded beyond her top lip and seemed to be always trying to bite the bottom one. It was this same peculiarity, inherited from their mother, that had caused Elsie to dismiss the children in her mind as "rabbity-mouthed." But they were nice children, well grown and healthy-looking, and not nearly so primly mannered as John had been as a boy. And John! John was going bald, and John's shoulders stooped, and, though he was lean in face as ever, his stomach had an outward curve that came from sitting so many hours over his books. He was senior lecturer in classics, now, at the university where once he had been only a "day-trainer," he had hopes of a chair when old Professor Smithers retired—if ever he consented to retire—and that was the final goal of John's ambitions.

His wife thought him a very important person; she adored him, and warmed his slippers for him, and looked forward to their cosy teas together, just as John's mother used to do. And John took his responsibilities as husband and father very seriously, and looked after his wife and eased the burden of her domestic duties for her in every way he could, just as he had done for his mother in the old days. So that, so far as John's development was concerned, you might imagine that John had just exchanged a mother for a wife, and youth for middle-age.

But times were changing and, as John said, the war had taught him a lot; and, in fine, a man is a poor sort of fellow

if he can't learn to lighten himself of his prejudices and broaden his mind. So you will be rejoiced to hear that, nowadays, John is neither a prig nor a snob, but a thoroughly sound fellow. You don't believe it? People don't change like that? Well, argue it out for yourselves: if John were still the kind of prig he used to be, would he be sitting at this moment in Lucio Castelli's Circus, regretting the manner in which he used to look down on Luke, and telling his children that Lucia is their cousin? Granted that circuses are coming into fashion again, and that Castelli's is not a poverty-stricken concern, but bidding fair to become one of the most important circuses of the day (*the* most important perhaps, eventually, who knows?) that Whitfield is in the act of going crazy over Castelli's because the founder was once a Whitfield lad, and that there is a certain reflected glory, very gratifying to small minds, in claiming acquaintance and kinship with someone who at the moment is so much in the public eye. All that is true, but all that is no reason for John to have brought his wife and children to see Castelli's—only a cynical mind would suggest such a thing. No, John is here because he is pleased at Luke's success and wants to encourage his show, and is looking forward to shaking hands with his brother when the show is ended. And so he smiled and answered, "Perhaps they will," when Mrs John asked if he thought the Castelli's would give them tea in one of the caravans.

The Castelli's did. Clearing his throat rather nervously, and closely followed by Mrs. John and the children, John, as he went out through the front entrance at the close of the performance, asked a uniformed official if he might speak to Signor Lucio Castelli.

And the uniformed official, who was no other than our friend Bobby Gough, said, "Certainly sir," and directed him to Luke's new two-roomed and conveniently appointed trailer.

Luke was just changing his fine red coat for an old patched tweed one. He looked at his brother uncertainly for a moment, then he exclaimed, "John!" and held out both his hands. And then there was a good deal of smiling and laughter, and Luke was introduced to Mrs. John and the children; and Anna, who was looking very homely, but exceedingly beautiful, in a work-a-

day blouse and skirt, and with her dark tawny-lighted hair curling back from her smooth forehead like a halo, was brought forward and introduced to every one, and so were Lucia and Janos and Sandro and Vador and Roberta and Ham.

John said, "I congratulate you, Luke, I do indeed."

And Luke smiled and said, "So you liked the show?"

And, "Oh yes!" chorused Mrs. John and Jack and Lilian.

Then they all had tea, and those who couldn't sit down stood up, and during the entire meal Jack couldn't take his eyes off Lucia.

After tea, whilst John talked to Luke, Lucia and Janos were told to show their cousins the horses and the elephants and the dogs and the monkeys, and anything else that might interest them, including the two little cubs that belonged to Stars and Stripes. And it was outside Stars' cage, whilst Lilian was talking to Janos, that Lucia received from twelve-year-old Jack the very first proposal of marriage that had ever been offered her.

"Oh no thank you," answered Lucia at once, "I'm goin' to marry Sandro." (Sandro knew nothing about this, but Lucia had long ago made up her mind.)

Jack, who was as circus-mazed as Garrick himself, looked very disappointed. He sighed and said, "Then I suppose I'll have to ask Roberta."

But that was not the same thing at all. For if Jack had fallen in love with the circus in general, he had, in particular, fallen in love with Lucia's golden curls, and Roberta's hair was black as ink. Moreover it was not Roberta who, her body glittering with spangles and her arms and legs bare, had stepped into the steel arena and put her head in Stripes' mouth.

"But Roberta's engaged to Janos," said Lucia.

"The sauce," thought Lucia, "to expect us to tie ourselves up to a flatty, even if he is our cousin."

But Lucia didn't speak her thoughts aloud, because she had a feeling that her dad wouldn't like her to; so Jack, although disappointed, was able that night to dream happy dreams of Lucia, untroubled by her somewhat poor opinion of him.

It was close on sunset, and already nearing the time for the evening performance, when John and his family said good-bye to the Castellì's. John was in a very pleasant humour. He had

made his peace with Luke, and wiped out in both their minds all memory of old bitterness. "I always felt, somehow, he'd make good," he explained to Mrs. John, as, after parting from Luke, they walked home to their neat little villa on the hill above the Endcliffe woods. "He was a very odd boy, you know, sulky and—but a bit of a genius, in his own way, and that's bound to make things difficult."

"What a strange kind of life, though," remarked Mrs John, slipping her arm through his.

"Shouldn't mind it myself," said John complacently. "That is, of course—" he gave her arm a little squeeze, "provided I were a free agent."

Luke had strolled with his brother a little way up the hill through the woods. The path through these woods was a favourite walk for the Whitfield people; there were seats here and there under the trees, and here and there, where the path was level, a clearing where one might look down on the Endcliffe meadows and the river, and across to the moors rising behind the red brick suburb of Camershaw that crowded the lower slopes of the hill beyond the river.

It was at one of these clearings, not more than fifty yards above the circus field, that Luke, returning from his stroll with John, paused to look down. The sun had just set behind the woods, and dusk was filling the cup of the valley. Through the valley the river flowed palely silver, and on its banks, and away to the north in the murky huddle of Whitfield town, lights like frailest stars were beginning to twinkle. One by one up the steep slope of Camershaw Road, like golden bubbles floating in the dusk, street lamps were being lighted. There was one, Luke remembered, just outside number nineteen; that would be number nineteen, then, down near the bottom of the road, a faint gleam of red brick behind the bubble of light. But that faint red gleam brought no emotion at all, whether of pleasure or pain, to the watching Luke. Such a little unimportant smudge, it seemed, showing behind the shining of the lamp; Luke did not even wonder who was sitting in the back parlour where his mother used to drum, drum, drum at the sewing machine, or what small, unwilling boy or girl was being put to bed in the tiny room

upstairs. Number nineteen Camershaw Road seemed to have nothing whatever to do with Luke.

There was his world, lying below him, enclosed in the friendly dusk of the Endcliffe meadows. The grouped wagons with lamps shining behind their flowered window curtains, and smudges of smoke rising from their chimney stacks. The lighted tents, with the shapes of horses and men and elephants moving, grotesquely magnified, behind their transparent walls. The rush of cars arriving. The dense crowds making their way through the gates of the tober, their faces and hands splashed, red, blue, green, and yellow, from the rows of coloured electric lights that framed the entrance to the big-top. The big-top itself, opalescent, shining softly, the stripes on its roof sloping dark and pale over its hidden lamps, its high, glimmering walls latticed with the dark forms of those who had already taken their seats—head above head, body above body, thronging already behind those glimmering walls.

Listen! The stirring crash of the band, breaking in upon the confused murmur rising from the crowd outside and the shrill, yelling voice of the lad, Sandro, standing beside the ticket office. Now the band silent again, the rumour of the crowd swelling upward, calling to every nerve in Luke's body—*his* crowd, *his* people, the generous, enthusiastic, eager public, for whose pleasure Lucio Castelli's Circus existed. And, shrill above the rumour of the crowd, Sandro's uplifted voice:

"Pass along, pass along, please, the show is about to *commence*! *Three* shillings and sixpence to the right, two-and-four and also one-and-three to the left! Chil-dren half-price to *all* seats! Let the reserved ticket holders pass first, *if* you please!

"Pass along, pass along, the show is about to *com-mence*!"

The crowd steadily streaming past the ticket office. Then a block in the stream; a surge of people round the ticket office; here and there a group breaking away; an opposite stream, now, making back towards the gate; chaotic mingling of the crowd approaching with the crowd returning; a babble of voices, shouting, complaining, questioning, explaining. No more people passing the ticket office; the big-top was filled to overflowing. On this, Castelli's first night at Whitfield, there was a turn-away!

It was grand, grand! Luke's heart swelled with indescribable

emotion, as he looked down and watched what was happening in the show world he had created.

Then again he heard Sandro's shrill voice rising out of the lighted dusk:

"The man-age-ment re-grets that it has to turn any a-way! The man-age-ment is pleased to an-nounce that there will be per-form-ances at four o'clock and eight o'clock to-morrow!

A pause. Then a louder shout:

"The man-age-ment will ar-range for mo-tor buses to bring the dis-ap-pointed to to-mor-row's per-form-ances at spec-i-ally re-duced rates! The buses will run from Whit-field High Street!"

Good lad, Sandro! This was his own inspired idea. Good lad, Sandro, a showman in the making.

Now again the crashing of the band. The sixteen white liberties—their slim bodies gleaming like pearls, their elegant heads tossing, their long tails like streams of silver—being led round to the back entrance. Disappearing one by one under the lifted canvas. Time the ring-master hurried to get into his red coat! A clown entrée—Twinkles and the children—a bar act—Otto and Sofia and Lucia and Sandro—then the ring-master and the liberties. It was all there waiting for him, his world, the world he had created.

Before he moved to descend the hill, Luke drew in his breath in a long sigh of contentment. He was thinking of the little lad who had dreamed his dream-world so long and so steadfastly that the dream had become a reality. "In the beginning Lucio Castelli created a circus" . . . first in the mind, in the dream. Even so must God have dreamed the universe into being. Was He disappointed in His universe? Perhaps, at times. There were the ups and the downs awaiting every creator. There were bad artistes as well as good, there was carelessness, indifference, cruelty, accident, jealousy, selfishness. And even when, by constant watchfulness and unwearying effort, you seemed to have eliminated all possible chances of evil, there was still the unaccountable and unforeseeable, there was still death, a shadowy spectator at every performance.

But surely there was no room for disappointment in the world to-night. Not in Luke's world, at least; the glimmering, opales-

cent, enchanted yet so firmly fashioned reality, waiting to receive him with its music, its colour, its cheerful shining, standing on a sure foundation and enclosed in its own light. . . .

And Lucio Castelli saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

T H E   E N D

## GLOSSARY

<i>Balonie</i>	Nonsense.
<i>Bark</i>	To tub-thump outside a show.
<i>Barney</i>	A fight.
<i>Bever</i>	To drink.
<i>Bevy</i>	A pub.
<i>Bevy omev</i>	A drunkard.
<i>Bianc</i>	A shilling.
<i>Big-top</i>	The circus tent.
<i>Binco</i>	A light.
<i>Bona</i>	Good.
<i>Buffer</i>	A performing dog.
<i>Cady</i>	A hat.
<i>Cat</i>	Lion or tiger.
<i>Carsey or Casa</i>	A house.
<i>Chat</i>	A thing. Anything.
<i>Chavie</i>	A child.
<i>Clem</i>	A fight.
<i>Clobber</i>	Clothes.
<i>Crackers</i>	Daft.
<i>Cul</i>	A friend.
<i>Denari</i>	Money.
<i>Dona</i>	A woman.
<i>Fiddling</i>	Doing good business.
<i>Flatly</i>	Member of the audience. Outsider. Someone who is not "circus."
<i>Gaff</i>	The circus. A show. A booth.
<i>Gajo</i>	Outsider.
<i>Hard-top</i>	A gentleman. (One who wears a hard hat.)
<i>Hey Rube!</i>	War cry of circus.
<i>Hobo</i>	A loafer. A hanger-on about a show.
<i>Joint</i>	Booth or small show at a fair.
<i>Josser</i>	Outsider. (A term of disrespect).
<i>Kip</i>	Bed.
<i>Letties</i>	Lodgings.



<i>Liberty</i>	A horse that performs without a rider.
<i>Multi-cattivo</i>	Very bad.
<i>Nanty</i>	No. Not.
<i>Nark</i>	To be annoyed. To nag.
<i>Nibs</i>	Self. (His nibs, the person referred to.)
<i>Nobbings</i>	Takings.
<i>Omev</i>	A man.
<i>Palarie</i>	To talk.
<i>Parni</i>	Water. Rain.
<i>Pig</i>	Elephant.
<i>Ponger</i>	An acrobat.
<i>Prad</i>	A horse.
<i>Roust</i>	To stir up. Hustle. Put guts into.
<i>Rozin back</i>	A jockey-act horse. (So called because his back is sprinkled with powdered resin to afford grip for performer's feet.)
<i>Rozzer</i>	A policeman.
<i>Rum-Cul</i>	The Boss. Circus proprietor.
<i>Saltee</i>	A penny.
<i>Scarper</i>	To go. Depart. Run away.
<i>Screw</i>	To look at.
<i>Shiner</i>	A sovereign.
<i>Snarl</i>	To steal.
<i>Stall</i>	To fail in a trick.
<i>Tober</i>	The circus ground.
<i>Tober omev</i>	Owner of the circus ground. Rent collector.
<i>Tod</i>	Alone. (On my tod. By myself. On my own.)
<i>Vardo</i>	A wagon.
<i>Yob</i>	An outsider. (Term of disrespect.)





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